Maida's Little Shop
Primrose Court
Massachusetts
House Rock
Fairy Ring
The Magic Mirror
Tree Hou
Road to Maida's Little Camp in the Adirondacks
The Little House
The Big House
The Stonecrop
Tilestone Hollow
Boy's House
Mess Hall
Girl's House
Tilestone Lane
Old Mill
Post Office
Brick House
MILL ROAD
The Barn

Northern Eye
Spectacles Island
The Bridge
Stonehenge
Southern Eye
The Ark
Sandy Beach
Atlantic Ocean
N
W
E
S
THE BIG 8

Maida's Little House

The Maida Books

By INEZ HAYNES IRWIN

Maida's Little Shop
Maida's Little House
Maida's Little School
Maida's Little Island
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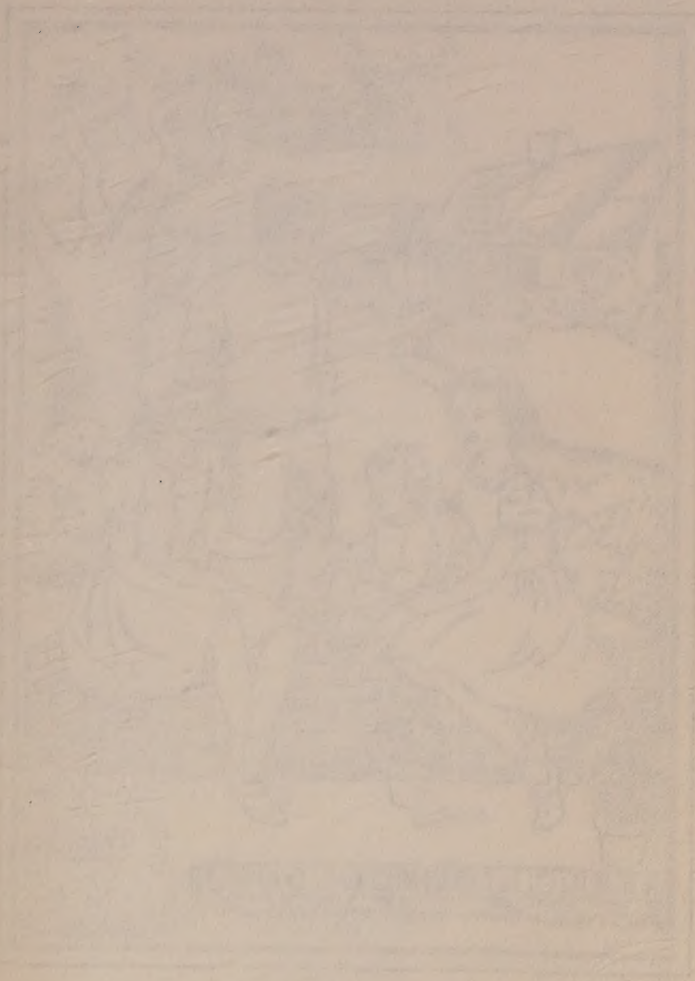

Maida's Little House

BY INEZ HAYNES IRWIN

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To

Barbara Iverson Haynes

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CHAPTER I

THE HOME COMING

"I WONDER when Maida's coming back?" said Rosie Brine as she approached the trio of children who sat on the Lathrop lawn.

The three were Laura Lathrop; her brother, Harold Lathrop; their friend, Arthur Duncan. Rosie did not join them on the grass. She seated herself in the hammock behind them and began to swing, first slowly, then so violently that her black curls swept back and forth with her swift progress and her speech came in jerks. "I wouldn't mind—how long I had to wait—if I only knew—when she was coming."

Nobody answered. Rosie had only asked a question that they all asked at intervals, hoping against hope that somebody would make a comforting guess.

"I don't believe she's *ever* coming back," Rosie answered herself, recklessly swinging almost over their heads.

Arthur Duncan, a big broad-shouldered boy with tousled thick brown hair beating down over his forehead and almost veiling eyes as steady as they were black, answered this. "Oh Maida's coming home some time. She promised and she always keeps her promises."

"When we were going to school," put in Laura Lathrop, "it was bad enough. But we didn't have time to miss her so much then. But now that school's over and there's nothing to do—Oh, how I wish she were here!"

"Well, what good would it do?" Harold Lathrop asked. Harold and Laura looked much alike although Laura was slim and brown-haired and Harold flaxen and a little stout. But both had blue eyes and small, regular features.

"We wouldn't see anything of her," Harold continued, "she'd be going away somewhere for the summer and we wouldn't have a chance to get to know her until fall."

"Maida'd never do that," Rosie Brine declared emphatically. "She'd manage some way to be with us for a while." She brought the hammock to a stop for a moment with the swift kick of a determined foot against a tuft of grass. "There's one thing I am sure of and that is that Maida would never forget us

or want to be away from us. She says that in every letter I've got from her."

"Well, what are we going to do to-day?" Harold demanded. "I should think from the way we sit here that we had not been counting up the days to vacation for a month. Why Laura's even had the hours all numbered out on her calendar, so's she could draw a line through them every night."

"I wanted to have the minutes marked out too," Laura admitted, "but it took too much time."

"What are we going to do?" Harold persisted. "Here it is the first day of vacation, and we sit here saying nothing. You think of something, Arthur, you always can."

Arthur Duncan rolled over face downwards on the grass. "I can't think of anything to do this morning," he admitted. "It's so hot . . . and I feel so lazy . . . seems to me I'd just like to lie here all day."

It was hot that late June day in Charlestown. Not a breeze stirred the shrubs of the Lathrop lawn. The June roses drooped; the leaves seemed wilting; even the blue sky looked thick and sultry. Huge white clouds moved across it so lazily that it was as though they too felt the general languor. The children

looked as children generally look at the close of school, pale and a little tired. Their movements were listless.

Just outside the gate of the Lathrop place was Primrose Court; a little court, lined with maples and horse-chestnuts with shady little wooden houses set behind tiny gardens, in their turn set within white wooden fences. At one corner of Primrose Court and Warrington Street, set directly opposite a school house, was a little shop. And over the shop printed in gold letters against a background of sky blue, hung a sign which read:

MAIDA'S LITTLE SHOP

In Primrose Court, the smaller children were playing as briskly as though there were no such thing as weather. Brown-eyed, brown-haired, motherly Molly Doyle, quick, efficient but quiet, was apparently acting as the wife and mother of an imaginary house. Smaller and younger, Timmie Doyle, her brother, a little pop-eyed, brownie-like boy, slow-moving and awkward, was husband and father. There were four chidren in this make-believe household. Quite frequently, little Betsy Hale, slim, black-eyed and rosy-

cheeked and little Delia Dore, chubby and blonde with thick red curls, attempted to run away; were caught and punished with great thoroughness. Apparently Dorothy and Mabel Clark, twin sisters, one the exact duplicate of the other, with big, round blue eyes and long round golden curls, were the grown-up daughters of this make-believe family. They were intent on household tasks, thrusting into an imaginary stove absolutely real mud pies and sweeping an imaginary room with an absolutely real dust-pan and brush.

Aside from this active scene, everything was quiet. Farther down the Court, doves had settled; were pink-toeing about feeding busily; preening and cooing.

"Sometimes," Laura said thoughtfully, "I feel as though I had dreamed Maida. If the Little Shop were not here with her name over the door and all of you to talk about her with me, I should believe I had just waked up." She stopped a moment. "If it had been a dream how mad I should be to think I *had* waked up."

"Do you remember how exciting it was when Maida first came to live over the Little Shop?" Rosie exclaimed.

"I should say I did!" It was Laura who

answered her. "Wasn't it wonderful when all that pretty furniture came for their rooms?"

"Yes, and the canaries and the great geraniums for the windows," Rosie added eagerly.

"The most wonderful thing though," Arthur went on, "was when the sign went up. It was such a pretty sign—MAIDA'S LITTLE SHOP in gold painted on blue. And—"

"Gee, how wild we all were to see Maida!" Harold said.

"I don't know what I expected," Rosie's voice was dreamy, "but I certainly was surprised when Maida appeared—"

"Lame," Arthur concluded for her, "like Dicky. But they're both all right now. Dicky certainly is and Maida was when she left for Europe."

"I often think," Harold began again after a little pause, "of when we first met her and she used to talk of the things her father gave her, we thought she was telling lies."

"I never thought she was telling lies," Rosie expostulated. "I loved her too much for that. I knew Maida wouldn't tell lies. I thought she'd just dreamed those things. I remember them all—her mother's mirror and brush and comb of gold with her initials in diamonds....

And the long string of pearls that she used to wear that came to her knees. . . . And a dress of cloth of gold trimmed with roses and a diamond, like a drop of dew, in the heart of every rose."

"Yes, and the peacocks at her father's place, some of them white," Arthur interrupted.

"And don't you remember," Harold went on, "we all thought she was crazy when she said that once he gave her for a birthday present her weight in twenty-dollar gold-pieces."

"And a wonderful birthday party," Laura added eagerly, "with a Maypole and a doll-baby house big enough to go into and live—"

"I don't wonder we didn't believe it all," Rosie declared with conviction, "It sounds like a fairy tale. And then it turned out that she was the daughter of a great millionaire and *every word* of it was true. Do you remember how we asked Mr. Westabrook at Maida's Christmas tree if it was all true and he said that it was?"

"I'd like to see those white peacocks," Dicky said dreamily.

"I'd like to see that doll-baby house," Laura added wistfully.

"I'd like to see the gold comb and brush and

mirror with the diamonds," Rosie declared, "and that dress with the roses and the diamond dew-drops. I like to look at precious stones. I like things that sparkle."

At this thought, she herself sparkled until her eyes were like great black diamonds in her vivid brilliant face.

"I'd like to see that pile of twenty-dollar gold-pieces," Harold said.

"Oh I wish she'd come back," Rosie sighed. The sparkle all went out of her face and she stopped swinging.

A door leading into Primrose Court opened with a suddenness that made them all jump. A boy with big eyes, very brown and lustrous, lighting his peaked face and straight hair very brown and lustrous, framing it, came bounding out. He ran in the direction of the group on the lawn, and as he ran he waved something white in his hand. The doves flew away before him in a glittering V. "Hurrah!" he yelled.

"Gee, how Dicky can run!" Arthur Duncan exclaimed. "Who'd ever believed that one year ago, he was wearing an iron on his leg? He—"

"Oh what is it, Dicky?" Rosie Brine called impatiently.

Dicky had by this time reached the Lathrop gate.

"A post card from Maida," he shouted.

"Does she say when she's coming home?" Laura asked quickly.

"No," Dicky answered. He threw himself down among them; handed the post card to Rosie who had leaped from the hammock. It passed from hand to hand. Harold, the last to receive it, read it aloud. "Love to everybody and how I wish I could see you all!" was with the date, all it said.

"Nothing about coming home," exclaimed Rosie, "Oh dear, how disappointed I am."

"Where's it from?" Arthur asked, as though suddenly remembering something. "The last post card was from Paris."

"London," Dicky answered.

"London," Arthur echoed, "she told me that when she came home, she'd sail from England."

"Did she?" Rosie asked listlessly. "She never told me that, but you see, she says nothing of sailing. She's probably going to spend the summer there. I remember that she told me of a beautiful place they lived in one summer in England. She said that there was a forest not far from the house where Robin

Hood and his men used to meet. Probably she will go there." Rosie stopped for a minute and then the listlessness in her voice changed to a kind of despair. "I don't believe she'll ever come back."

"I know she will," Dicky announced with decision. "The last thing Maida said was, 'I'll come back,' and she always keeps her promises."

"I wouldn't be surprised if she came back this summer some time," Arthur said. "Anyway I know she said they'd sail from England."

"Yes but by that time we'll all be away." Laura's voice held a disappointed note. "We're going to Marblehead in a week or two for the whole summer and you're going to Weymouth, Rosie, aren't you?"

Rosie nodded. "Only for two weeks though."

"Where are you going?" Laura asked Arthur.

"I don't know. When my father gets his two weeks' vacation, maybe we'll take a tramp somewhere, that is if it doesn't come after school has begun."

"And where are you going, Dicky?" Laura went on.

"Nowhere. We're going to stay here in Charlestown. Primrose Court will be my vacation. Mother says she will try to take us to City Point or Revere or Nantasket every Sunday. Now what are we going to do today?"

"We might go upstairs in the cupola and play games," Harold suggested.

"No I don't want to stay in the house the first day of vacation," Rosie announced discontentedly.

"Let's play stunts," suggested Dicky who, since his lame leg had recovered, could never seem to get enough of athletic exercise.

"Too hot," decided Laura.

"Hide-and-go-seek," suggested Arthur.

"Too hot," decided Harold.

"Follow-My-Leader," suggested Dicky.

"Too hot," decided Rosie.

"Hoist-the-Sail," suggested Arthur.

"Too hot," decided Laura.

"Prisoners' Base," suggested Harold.

"Too hot," decided Rosie.

"Tag," suggested Arthur.

"Too hot," decided Harold.

Laura burst out laughing. "Every game anybody proposes is too hot for somebody else. I say let's all lie face downwards and think

and think and *think* until somebody gets an idea of something new that we can do."

Everybody adopted her suggestion. The four on the grass turned over, lay like stone images carved there. Rosie turned over in the hammock.

"I wish Maida'd come home!" came from her in muffled accents before she, too, subsided.

. . . . . .

A whole minute passed. Nobody moved. Even Rosie kept rigid.

Into the silence floated the note of a far-away automobile horn. It was not so much a call or warning as a gay carolling, a long level ribbon of sound which unwound itself continuously and, drifting on the soft spring air, came nearer and nearer. It stopped for a moment . . . started again . . . continued more and more gayly . . . ran up and down a trilled scale once more . . .

The stone images stirred uneasily.

The horn grew louder. . . . In a moment it would pass Primrose Court. . . . The horn ended in a high swift call. . . . The car stopped. . . .

The stone images lifted their heads.

A girl, lithe but strong-looking with wide-apart big gray eyes gleaming in a little face,

just touched in the cheek with pink, with masses of feathery golden hair hanging over her blue coat, was stepping out of the car.

The images flashed upright; leaped to their feet.

"It's Maida!" Rosie Brine called as she sped like an arrow shot from a bow towards the automobile. "Oh, Maida! Maida! Maida! Maida!"

"It's Maida!" the others took it up and raced into the Court.

CHAPTER II

THE PLAN

"WHEN did you land?" "Why didn't you let us know?" "How long are you going to stay?" "Did your father come too?" "Where's Billy Potter?" "How's Dr. Pierce?" And "Oh how you've grown!"

Maida tried to answer them all; to hug each of the girls who were hugging her all together; to hold out a hand to each of the three boys who seemed all to shake both her hands at once; to manage to kiss Betsy Hale, who hearing the name Maida shouted, vaguely recalled that there had once been a Maida whom she loved; and who thereupon, hung tight to one of her legs; to manage to kiss Delia Dore who had no remembrance of Maida whatever but in imitation of Betsy, hung tight to the other leg; and in addition to call to Molly and Timmie and Dorothy and Mabel who remembered her perfectly and who danced like little wild Indians on the outskirts of the crowd, yelling, "Maida's come back! Maida's come back!" at the top of their lungs.

All this took much less time to happen than it has taken to describe, and it was suddenly interrupted by the rapid opening of the door to the Dore yard. A little old Irish woman with silvery hair and with a face as wrinkled as a nut, came rushing out, her arms extended calling, "My lamb's come back! My lamb's come back!"

Maida ran to her and hugged her ecstatically. "Oh, dear Granny Flynn!" she said, "Dear, dear Granny Flynn!"

Then there appeared back of Granny Flynn, Mrs. Dore—Granny Flynn's daughter; Delia and Dicky Dore's mother—who had to be met in the same affectionate way. Mrs. Dore was a tall, brown, fresh-complexioned woman. It was from her that Dicky inherited his brown coloring and Delia her sparkling expression.

"I'd never know you for the same child," Mrs. Dore said.

Of course the grown people claimed Maida's attention first. They showered her with questions and she answered them every one with all her old-time courtesy and consideration. Was she well? Well! But look at her! When did she land? She had landed the day before in New York; had come on the midnight to Boston. Where was she living? At their home

on Beacon Street. Would she stay to lunch? Yes! Yes! *Yes!* Her father had said that if she were invited, she could spend the whole rest of the day in Primrose Court; he would send the car for her late in the afternoon. Where was she going after that? Her father would tell them all this afternoon. He had some plans, but they weren't worked out yet. Would she be in Boston for a few days? Probably. Then, during that time, wouldn't she like to come back to her own rooms over MAIDA'S LITTLE SHOP? *Would she?* Oh goody, she could telephone her father to bring her some clothes. . . . It went on and on until the older children stood first on one foot and then on the other with impatience; and the younger ones went back to their house-keeping game and their frequent punishments.

But finally the curiosity of this group of grown-ups was satisfied and the children claimed their prey. A clamorous group—every one of them telling her some bit of news and all at once—they made the tour of the Court. They called on Mrs. Lathrop, who mercifully forebore to ask more than five minutes of questions; and on the Misses Allison, a pair of middle-aged maiden ladies. Here

the confusion doubled itself because of the noisy screams of Tony the parrot.

Tony kept calling at the top of his croaking voice, "What's this all about?" Each of the children tried to tell him, but he was apparently dissatisfied with their explanations; for he only called the louder and with greater emphasis, "I *say—what* is this all about?" Finally, in despair he exclaimed, "Good-night, sweet dreams," and subsided.

At length, the six of them—Maida, Rosie, Laura, Arthur, Dicky and Harold—retired to the Lathrop lawn and plumped down on the grass. They talked and talked and talked. . . .

"How you have grown, Maida!" Rosie said first. "How tall you are and strong-looking!" She would have added, "And how pretty!" if the boys had not been there, but shyness kept her from making so personal a comment in their presence.

"That's exactly what I was thinking about you," Maida laughed, "but then you have all grown, Arthur particularly." In her candid, friendly way, she surveyed them, one after another. "You are taller too, Laura, and I believe even your hair has grown."

"It certainly has," Laura admitted. Laura's hair was extraordinarily long and thick. It hung in two light-brown braids, very glossy, not a hair out of place, to below Laura's waist. At the tip of each braid was a big pale blue bow.

"As for you, Rosie, you are still taller than I, I'm afraid."

"Let's measure," Rosie answered springing to her feet.

The two girls stood shoulder to shoulder. Rosie, it proved, was a little the taller. Maida continued to look at her after they had resumed their places on the grass. "What a beauty she is," she thought; and she too was withheld by shyness and a sense of delicacy from making this comment before the others.

Rosie was certainly handsome. Tall, active, proud-looking; great black eyes lighted by stars; a mass of black hair breaking into high waves and half curls; cheeks as smooth as satin and stained a deep crimson—ivory-white, jet-black, coral-crimson—that was Rosie. Maida had always called her Rose-Red.

"But the greatest change has come in Dicky and me," Maida ended. "We have both lost our lameness. You don't limp, Dicky, and I don't. Let's race to the gate and back."

Dicky was on his feet in a minute. Arthur called, "One to make ready, two for a show—" At the word, *"Go"* they were off. Dicky was more active but Maida was taller. The race finished a tie.

The blood which Maida's running brought to her cheeks painted roses there; not the deep crimson roses which bloomed perpetually in Rosie's face but transient blossoms, delicately pink. And under that flush, her face, a healthy ivory, looked well. Her big gray eyes were filled with happiness and the torrent of her pale-gold feathery hair seemed to gush from her head like living light.

They sat and talked until luncheon and immediately after luncheon gathered on the lawn and talked again. Maida still had questions to ask and comments to make.

"You have all grown," she said once, "but somehow I think the little children have grown the most and Dorothy and Mabel more than anybody! Their eyes still look like great blue marbles and their hair as though it had been curled over a candlestick. Isn't it marvelous how they keep exactly the same height. Twins are magical creatures, aren't they? As for Betsy and Delia—they're great big girls. I suppose Betsy still runs away every chance

she gets. On the whole I think Molly and Timmie have changed the least. Does Timmie still fall into all the 'pud-muddles?' Molly still looks like a darling brown robin and Timmie like a brown bogle. Don't you re-remember I used to call them Robin and Bogle."

The children answered all her questions. Yes, Betsy still ran away. No, Bogle had quieted down. He didn't fall into "pud-muddles" any more. Of course they had their questions to ask Maida about her year in Europe. And she told them of her experiences in Italy, Switzerland, France, and England. But though she answered them instantly, and with the fullness of detail which had always been her characteristic, it seemed at moments as though her mind were not all on what she was saying. Once or twice, she even interrupted herself to start something which had nothing to do with her subject. But apparently, both times, she thought better of it and checked a tongue which obviously was yearning to speed on in the interest of that unknown subject.

"There's something you want to tell us Maida," Dicky guessed shrewdly once. "But you won't let yourself."

Maida blushed furiously but her eyes danced. She did not answer. Rosie, thereupon, continued to watch her closely. "Maida Westabrook, you're almost bursting over something," she said once; then as though with an inspiration, "You've got a plan of some kind and I know it."

Again Maida blushed and this time she laughed outright. "Wait and see!" was all she said, however.

After they had talked themselves out, they showed Maida the accumulated treasures of the last year. The wood-carving, which was Arthur's accomplishment and the paper-work which was Dicky's, had improved enormously. The beautiful box of tools that Mr. Westabrook had presented to the one and the big box of paints that he had given the other, were of course important factors in the improvement. Laura still danced beautifully and she danced her latest dance for Maida—a Spanish fandango. Harold was raising rabbits and he showed his entire family to Maida. At the urge of all this work, Rosie, who hated the sight of a needle, had taken in despair, to knitting. She could endure knitting she told Maida because the work grew so fast. She herself said though that the less

said about the results of her labor, the better. And Maida frankly agreed with her when she examined some of it.

After this the group returned to the yard for more talk.

Somehow they didn't feel like playing games. Late in the afternoon, they sprinkled the flower beds and hosed the lawn for Mrs. Lathrop. Then as this made further sitting on the grass impossible, they retired to the tiny Dore yard with its amusing little flower bed and its one patch of grass. There was just about room for their group there. They sat down. Again they asked Maida about her travels. But now Maida was distinctly absent-minded. Suddenly in the midst of a description of Pompeii, there sounded a long, faint far-away call of an automobile horn. It broke, like a fire-rocket, into a flurry of star notes; then dropped a long liquid jet of sound which, again like a fire-rocket, dropped another shower of notes. The effect on Maida was electric. She came upright, quivering.

"That's father," she said. "*Now* I can tell you what I've been biting my lips all the morning to keep back. I didn't want to tell you until he was here to talk to your fathers and

mothers. But, oh, we've got such a beautiful plan for the summer— Oh it's so wonderful that it seems like a fairy tale."

The long jet of sound lengthened . . . came nearer . . .

"Father wants you all to come to spend the summer with us at Satuit. He's going to do the most beautiful thing you ever heard of in your life. Just as he gave me Maida's Little Shop, he is going to give me Maida's Little House. *He* is going to live in the Big House where he can have all the grown-up company he wants and *we* are going to live in the Little House. The Little House is so far away from the Big House that nobody would ever guess we were there. Oh, but it's all so beautiful and there are so many things to tell about it that I don't know where to begin. For one thing he's going to let us all help in — We girls are to do our part in the— And the boys are to take care of the— Oh it is such a duck of a house! Built very near a great big pond and not so very far off—the ocean. And there's a wood and House Rock and the Bosky Dingle . . . and . . . Oh,I don't know how to tell you about it. . . ."

She stopped for breath.

The horn came nearer and nearer.

The five faces stared at her. For one astounded instant nobody could speak.

"Oh Maida!" at last Rosie breathed. The two girls threw themselves upon her; Arthur rose and then suddenly sat down again but Dicky kept quite still his eyes full of stars. "I knew you'd have some plan, Maida," he said. Harold, unexpectedly, turned a somersault.

"I know I'm dreaming," Laura almost whispered.

The horn stopped. A great gray car turned into Primrose Court. A man, middle-aged, tall, massive and with a pronounced stoop to his shoulders, stepped out. He turned a head, big and shaggy as a buffalo, in the direction of Maida's Little Shop. The piercing eyes, fierce and keen as an eagle's, seemed to penetrate its very walls. This was Jerome Westabrook whom the world called, "Buffalo" Westabrook.

Maida dashed out of the yard, the children trailing her.

"Oh father, father, I've told them, I've told them! I couldn't keep it any longer after I heard the horn."

CHAPTER III

THE JOURNEY

AS the train drew into the Satuit Station, it seemed to spill children from every door. Counting them carefully, Granny Flynn and Mrs. Dore found to their great relief that the twelve, with whom they started, were still all with them. But—big and little—they were all so full of the excitement of the trip that it looked as though, at any moment, they might vanish in the strange country which surrounded them. Arthur, leading the two boys, started an investigation of the station. The three big girls followed. Only the little children, tired by the trip and awed to quiet by the unfamiliar surroundings, stayed close to the women's skirts. Timmie's big full eyes surveyed in wonder the strange new world. Delia, who had fallen comfortably asleep in her mother's arms, suddenly waked up, rubbing her eyes, and looked about her. "Oh take me back to Shalstown!" she wailed in a sudden attack of homesickness and fortunately fell asleep again.

"Oh here's the car!" Maida called.

A big comfortable limousine came round the bend of the road. The driver alighted, and came forward. "Here I am at last, Miss Maida," he said, his hand to his cap.

"Oh good afternoon, Botkins," Maida greeted him. She introduced him to Granny Flynn and Mrs. Dore; then to the children.

"I'm sorry I was late, ma'am," Botkins said to Granny Flynn, "but I nearly ran over a dog in the road. I stopped to see if it was all right."

"And was it?" Rosie Brine, who had a passion for animals, asked eagerly.

"Right as a trivet," Botkins answered.

"What is a trivet, Maida?" Rosie asked in a mystified aside.

"I'll show in a few minutes, goose," Maida rejoined. "It's an English word."

Botkins, who was English also, began stowing the party away in the automobile: Granny Flynn and Mrs. Dore on the back seats; Betsy and Delia between them; and Mollie and Timmie at their feet. Maida and Laura each holding a very active Clark twin, occupied the little seats. Rosie, to her great delight, was permitted to sit with the driver. The three boys hung onto the running board.

"We look like an orphan-asylum," Arthur commented as, with a long call of warning from the horn, they started off.

The road stretched straight before them, wide and yellow, furred with trees on both sides; then vanished under an arch of green as it turned to the left.

"Aren't there any houses in Satuit, Maida?" Laura asked.

"Plenty," Maida answered. "We'll come to some in a minute—then to more. In a little while, we'll go right through the town."

For a few moments nobody spoke; just watched for the first house. Presently a little white farmhouse, gambrel-roofed and old, popped into view at one side.

"Oh did you see that lovely old well with the long pole?" Rosie exclaimed from the front seat.

"That's a well-sweep," Maida explained. "It has a bucket at one end."

"Oh see the ponies! One, two, three, four, five—" but the car shot Laura past before she had all the ponies counted.

"Gee, look at all those hens!" came from Arthur. "Must be a hundred!"

And then followed a chorus of "Oh sees!" The beautiful big barn with its wide doors!

The lovely little pond covered with lily pads: The trim little vine-covered summer house perched on the hill! Bee hives! The old grave yard!

And, "See the moo-cow!" piped up Betsy Hale and "Tee the moo-tow!" Delia, as usual mimicked her.

Timmie did not speak; but his big eyes, made bigger by wonder, mirrored everything.

"There's the town!" Maida said finally and again for a few moments there was silence.

The town manifested itself at first only by scattered farmhouses. But these began to draw closer and closer together until, finally, they seemed almost to huddle about the beautiful little white church standing amidst rows of old lichen-covered slate gravestones, and pointing with a slender, delicately-cut-and-carved, white spire at the blue sky. Stores were here too, a moving picture house; a small inn; a post office; a garage.

Then the road turned suddenly and for an instant it was almost as though their speed would take them across the broad stretch of a velvety green lawn into the blue harbor which expanded beyond. This harbor bore here and there white-sailed boats. Not far away, a boy was fishing from the side of a dory.

There was a chorus of delighted *ohs* and *ahs* from the car. But their speed did not abate for a moment.

On they went and on; and soon the village was behind, far behind; houses were drawing apart from each other. The forest was closing about the farms, separating them. . . . Now the car was on the smooth hard road again, thick tree growths on both sides.

With a contented sigh, Betsy closed her eyes and fell fast asleep. Delia had long ago surrendered to the sand-man. Molly was trying her best to keep awake; but it was obvious that she could not hold out long. Timmie's eyes were beginning to film with fatigue, but he fought it manfully. Even the Clark twins had become silent. But the other children were as wide-awake as when they started.

More yellow road and more yellow road—more green trees and more green trees. In the front seat, Rosie bounced. "Oh Maida," she called, "it seems to me I can't wait. Will we ever get there?"

Maida's eyes danced. "Oh in an hour or so," she said airily.

"An hour," Laura groaned. "We have gone a thousand miles already."

Even as she spoke, the motor turned smooth-

ly, the horn emitting a long silvery gurgle. They entered, between two massive stone posts, a long avenue which curved away in the distance like a wide gray tape thrown amidst the trees.

"Maida Westabrook you fibber!" Rosie exclaimed, "we're here now!"

Maida only twinkled.

On they went. On both sides grew great trees. But, unlike the forests that stretched away from the public roads which they had just traversed, these woods had been freed of their underbrush. The grass beneath them was like velvet and lying on it, as though liquid gold had oozed or poured through the branches, shone tiny splashes and great pools of sunlight. It looked as though the whole green earth were caught in a golden net.

On and on! To the impatient children it seemed that they went miles.

"Oh!" Arthur Duncan exclaimed suddenly. And then, quite like a girl, again and again, "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

The car had turned so that it looked straight down into a cleared glade. At the end of the vista, a group of deer, dappled in white all over their lovely, dead-leaf brown bodies, lifted their heads, and with their great soft eyes sur-

veyed the car. But they stared for such a tiny fraction of a second that it scarcely seemed that the thing had happened at all for—flash! There was a glimpse of white as they turned tail. They vanished as instantly, as completely, as miraculously as though they were ghosts.

"Oh *Maida!*" Rosie exclaimed. "Deer! How wonderful! Do they belong to your father or are they wild?"

"Those that you saw are dappled deer. Father had them brought here from England," Maida answered. "But once in a while we do see wild deer in this country."

"Oh I'd like to see some *wild* deer," Arthur said.

Dicky didn't speak but his eyes were luminous. As for Harold, he was still gasping with the surprise of it.

On they went. The road curved and rippled like a ribbon being constantly thrown ahead of them. Suddenly they came to a great cleared space, smoother than any plush. Botkins stopped the car. At the end towered a huge house of white marble, with terraces. On the lawn, which stretched between the children and the house, grew, widely-separated, a few stately trees; wine-glass elms,

oaks; copper beeches and powdered spruces. It was very still now and, unimpeded, the setting sun was sending great golden shafts across that stretch of plushy grass. They struck a pool of water in a marble basin in the middle of that emerald velvet; and through the fountain which played about it. Here... there . . . yonder . . . motionless in that liquid golden light . . . were white objects...

"What are those white things?" Dicky asked curiously.

And then, one of the white objects arose, opened like a fan, spread to a wonderful size its snow-white tail; moved in stately fashion along the velvety-green lawn.

"Maida!" Dicky gasped. "Not—Yes they are—white peacocks!"

"Yes," Maida answered. "White peacocks. I am so glad they were there. Everything has happened just as I wanted it. Sometimes it will be days before you see deer, although there are so many here. And sometimes the peacocks wander to the back of the house. I knew you wanted to see them, Dicky, and I've been hoping all along that they would be here for you. There are seven. We have a dozen."

Dicky was listening with all his ears; but at the same time he was looking with all his eyes. For out of the trees to the left, suddenly appeared another pair of peacocks in full sail. Not white ones this time; great prismatic, blue and green creatures—the sun struck bronze lights out of them as they floated on.

"It's like a fairy tale," Dicky breathed.

"Are we going to live there?" Rosie asked in an awed tone.

"Oh mercy no!" Maida answered. "That's father's house—the Big House. Our house is ever so much nicer."

"I hope it isn't any bigger," Laura said, her voice a little awed too.

Maida laughed a little. "No it's not quite as big as that," she admitted.

"Shall I go on, Miss Maida?" Botkins asked.

"Yes, please Botkins," Maida answered. And they continued to go on through more winding, geometrically perfect, beautifully-kept, gray roads; past armies and armies of trees: high, plumy-tipped, feathery-trunked aristocratic elms; vigorous, irregular-shaped, peasant-like oaks; clumps, gracefully-slender, fluttering a veil of green leaves, of white

birch; occasional pine, resinous and shining; beeches; firs. Suddenly everybody exclaimed at once, "Oh see the pond!"

"What pond is it?" Harold asked.

"It's called by some people Spy Pond," Maida answered, "but I call it the Magic Mirror. It's our pond and I think I ought to be allowed to call it what I want."

"I think so too," agreed Laura.

"What do you mean by *our* pond?" Arthur asked.

"Just what I say," Maida replied promptly. "It's our pond. It belongs to my father and it's a part of the grounds of Maida's Little House. We can go swimming in it every day. That is if we don't prefer—" She broke off in a little embarrassed laugh.

"Oh Maida you are so full of secrets I could *kill* you," Rosie threatened.

Maida only laughed.

They passed the pond which stretched for a considerable distance, long and crescent-shaped between its tree-hung banks, and now they were in the real forest. The road was smooth as always and beautifully-kept, but on both sides, the forest had been left to grow as it pleased. It was filled with underbrush. The tree trunks were obscured by great bushes.

Here and there through openings, the children could see gigantic rocks thrusting great heads and shoulders out of the masses of rusty-colored leaves.

"Oh isn't it lovely!" Rosie said in a perfect ecstasy. "Lovely, lovely, lovely!" she went on repeating dreamily as though caught in a trance of delight. She ended with a scream. "Did you see that? What was it Maida?"

"A woodchuck," Maida answered smilingly.

Timmie awakened by Rosie's scream, asked if there were any lions and tigers about. Much disappointed at Maida's *no,* he fell asleep again.

And now they seemed to be going up hill, slowly but steadily up. Up, up, up. The car had begun to speed a little. Ahead was another rounding curve. Botkins took it with a flash.

The car came out in front of—

It was one of the little colonial farmhouses a story-and-a-half in height; weather-colored, slant-roofed; to which addition after addition has been added by succeeding generations. It was set in an expanse of lawn, cut cleanly in two by a path of irregularly-shaped, sunken stones, dominated, one on either side, by twin

elms of enormous girth and amplitude. The house faced the east.

The additions, which now merged into one long structure, had gone off to the right and the north where they joined a big barn. This barn was the same velvety, gray weather-color as the house but with great doors painted a strange deep old blue which had faded to an even stranger, deeper blue. The sun struck into the open door and shot over the shining sides of half-a-dozen brilliantly colored canoes lying face-downwards on the floor; glittered in the bright-work of half-a-dozen bicycles, drawn up in a line.

The front door of the house opened as the automobile came in sight and a colored man and woman, young and smiling, came out to meet them. The automobile seemed to explode children, who started over the lawn of the house.

What a house it was!

The pointed-topped, pillared vestibule entrance was covered with roses which smothered it in a pink bloom. Hollyhocks, not blooming yet, marched in files along the front of the house. Lilacs, in heavy blossom, bunched in hedges at the ends. At one side, a trumpet vine, with a trunk as thick as iron

cable, had crept to the very top spine of the house, was crawling towards the single ample chimney which protruded from the middle of the roof. At the other side, a graceful elm thrust close to the shingles. A syringa bush and a smoke bush grew in front. But charming as was the house, interesting as was the barn, the children's eyes did not linger long on either of them, because inevitably their gaze fixed on that Annex which made an intermediate house between them. For in the middle of it—yes *in* it and *through* it—grew an enormous gnarled oak. Its trunk emerged from the roof and its long level branches spread over it in every direction. More than that—above that roof—securely caught in those flatly-growing, widely-spread branches was a little Tree House.

The colored pair were almost on them now.

"Good afternoon Floribel," Maida greeted them, "Good afternoon Zeke. Let me introduce you to Mrs. Flynn and Mrs. Dore."

Then she turned to the rest of the group.

"Children," she commanded in a tone of happy pride, "behold Maida's Little House."

CHAPTER IV

THE LITTLE HOUSE

DO you want to see the place now or wait until after supper?" Maida asked after the last admiring exclamation had died, the last pair of cramped legs had stretched themselves out.

"I'm starved," Rosie answered instantly, "but I must see everything first."

The others echoed Rosie's decision with a fury of enthusiasm.

"We can't see anything of the back of the house from here," Arthur said as though that clinched the matter.

And so while Granny Flynn and Mrs. Dore —the little children tagging them in a daze of fatigue, shot with excitement—were being taken care of by Floribel and Zeke, Maida led the older children on a voyage of exploration.

"Now first," she said in a practical voice, "let's go off a little distance—so that I can show you the whole lay of the land."

The six of them returned almost to the spot

where they had first caught sight of the Little House.

"I'm going to start by telling you a little of the history of the house," Maida began importantly. "This is the old Westabrook farmhouse and my father was born here; and his father and his father. It was built in 1645 and Westabrooks have lived in it from that day to this."

"Oh Maida!" Rosie said in an awed tone, "isn't that wonderful! Is it just the same as it was then?"

"No, indeed," Maida answered. "Almost every generation of Westabrooks added something to the original house. The barn was built later and also all those little additions—we call them the Annex—which connect the house with the barn, but it was my father who made the sides of them all windows."

"Who put the little house in the tree?" Dicky asked.

"My grandfather."

"Wasn't it wonderful that they left the tree!" Laura commented.

"Yes. You see my grandmother loved that big old tree dearly and so they saved it for her. Now where shall we go first?"

"Up the tree!" everybody answered.

"All right. I might have known you would have said that," Maida declared, "when I'm just *dying* to show you the house."

The tree grew out of the middle of the Annex. The floor had been fitted neatly about the tree-trunk. Stairs led up to the roof; and from the roof, a short flight of steps led to the Tree House. One after another the children mounted them. It took them into a little square room with windows looking in all four directions.

"Oh I can see Spy Pond—I mean the Magic Mirror!" Rosie exclaimed.

"And from here you can see the Big House," Laura exclaimed. "Not very much —just a sort of shining. . . ."

"Oh— But— Look— See!" Dicky stuttered in his excitement. "From here you can see the ocean!"

The children deserted the other windows and rushed to Dicky's side. In the west appeared all a-sparkle what looked like a great heaving mass of melted glass. On and on it stretched, and on, until it cut through the vapory sky and disappeared forever. A few sail boats like great gulls were beating their wings on its glittering surface.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Rosie said in a

solemn voice. "It makes me feel almost like not speaking."

"Wait until you see it in a nor'easter," Maida promised, "or a great thunder storm."

"Just think," Arthur said, "all my life I've wanted to learn to sail a boat—"

"You will sometime," Maida interrupted, "but father says we've all got to learn to swim before we can get into a sailboat."

"I know how to swim," Arthur stated in an off-hand voice. "All boys do."

"I don't," Dicky remonstrated.

"Well you will in a week," Maida promised.

Harold had all this time been keenly examining the ocean, the curving line of shore.

"What's that island off there, Maida?" he asked.

"Everybody else calls it Spectacles Island, because it's shaped like a pair of spectacles. But I call it Tom Tiddler's Ground, because nobody lives there. I don't see why I shouldn't call it what I want. It's *my* island."

"Your island," Rosie repeated. "Oh Maida, you lucky girl."

Maida flushed and looked ashamed. "I mean *our* island," she corrected herself.

"Well," Rosie said in a meditative tone, "with a farmhouse in the country, the ocean with an island in it in front of it; a forest with deer in back of it; and a pond—Maida can you thing of anything else that we could possibly have?"

"Well there might be a volcano on the island," Maida suggested, "a grotto somewhere like the Blue Grotto of Capri; and then of course we have no glaciers, geysers, hot springs, deserts or bogs—"

"Oh you goose!" Rosie interrupted. "You know we couldn't have any of those things."

"We might have a cave," Arthur said. "Are there any caves around here, Maida?"

"Not that I know of," Maida answered. "Now let me show you the rest of the place. You've been so busy looking at the ocean that you haven't noticed there's a tennis court and a croquet-ground just below."

The five excited faces peered out of the open window down through the tree branches and there was, indeed, a great cleared velvety lawn with wickets and stakes at one end and a tennis court marked in white kalsomine at the other.

"Now," Maida said, "come into the house. Oh I forgot to tell you that I call this tree

Father Time because it's the oldest one on the place. It's too bad that I named all these things years ago because you could have had the fun of naming them too."

"But I like all your names, Maida," Dicky declared.

Climbing down the narrow stairs, Maida conducted them through the two rooms of the Annex which lay between the Tree Room and the Little House. The tiny procession marched first into the kitchen which was the second of these rooms—a big sunny room, the walls painted a deep blue and hanging against them great pans and platters of brass and copper. From the kitchen, they entered the dining room; a big room also which ran the entire width of the house all doors and windows on the western side. A long, wide table in the center; chairs along the walls; and a pair of mahogany sideboards facing each other from the ends—these were its furnishings.

They passed through a door on the eastern wall.

"Now," Maida said, "we are in the original house. This used to be the old kitchen. Now it's the living room. Look at the great fireplace with the oven at one side. This big

wooden shovel was used to put the pans of bread in and to take them out. See how sweet all the old paneling is! That's been here from the beginning and the old H hinges and the old butterfly hinges! And these darling little closets! And those big old beams with the spatter work on them. Father had this great fender built around the fireplace so that the little chidren couldn't fall into it when there's a fire."

"Are we going to have fires in that enormous place?" Rosie asked.

"I wish the temperature would fall to below zero," Laura declared recklessly.

"I should think it would take four-foot logs," Arthur had beeen examining the fireplace. Crouching down he had even walked into it; stared up into the chimney.

"It does," Maida informed him proudly. "Oh, there, Rosie," she pointed to a little triangular brass object on the hearth, "is a trivet!"

Rosie pounced on it. "It looks like a brass cricket! What's it for?"

"To put the tea pot on, close to the fire so it will keep hot."

Out of the living room through the northern

door they came into one of the two smaller front rooms. The walls were lined with books. And here was a big table with a reading lamp, a desk, a few comfortable chairs.

"This is the library," Maida announced proudly.

"I'd like to shut myself up here for a month," Dicky, who was a great reader, said wistfully. "It looks as if all the books were interesting."

"Oh they are!" Maida assured him. "The Lang Fairy Books and Grimm and Andersen, George McDonald and Louisa M. Alcott and Howard Pyle and Stevenson and Kipling, and all the nicest books that father and Billy Potter and Dr. Pierce and I could think of. And lots more that they selected that I had never heard of."

From the library, they went out doors through the little vine-covered vestibule.

From upstairs came the voice of Granny Flynn and Mrs. Dore putting the younger children to bed.

"We three girls," Maida explained, "have rooms at the front of the house on the second floor. The nursery is back over the dining room."

"Where do we sleep?" Harold asked.

"You boys," Maida replied, "are going to sleep in the barn."

"Gee *whillikins!*" Dicky exclaimed. "What fun that'll be!"

"I'd rather sleep in a barn than any place I know," Arthur said.

"It's pretty good fun sleeping in a tent," Harold threw in.

"I was going to say," Arthur went on, "except out of doors in the woods."

"Now which shall I show you first," Maida asked, "the boys' rooms or the girls' rooms?" She did not wait for an answer. "Come on girls," she continued in a tone of resignation. "We've got to show the boys their place first. They won't look at anything until they've seen them!"

The procession moved toward the barn.

The lower floor—roomy, raftered, sweet-smelling—was empty except for the canoes; a small run-about; the bicycles; a phonograph; a big chest; garden tools. Maida led the way to the second floor. The railed stairway ran close to the side of the barn, brought them through a square opening in the ceiling, into another big room—the second story. Here, in each of three corners, were army cots;

beside each cot, a tall chiffonier. On top of each chiffonier were toilet articles in a simple style; beside each chiffonier a chair.

"That's your bathroom over there." Maida pointed to the fourth corner which was partitioned off. "It has a shower. I don't expect you'll use it much because we'll be bathing every day in the Magic Mirror. You hang your clothes on hooks behind these curtains. You see you each have a closet of your own."

The boys were of course opening chiffonier drawers; pulling aside curtain-draped closets; examining the shower. Their curiosity appeased, they made for down-stairs—and the canoes.

"Now while you boys are examining the barn, would you girls like to explore upstairs in the house?" Maida asked.

"I'm just dying to see my own room," Laura declared firmly.

The two girls pelted across the lawn in the wake of Maida's eager footsteps. They ran up the tiny steep flight of stairs, exactly opposite the little vestibule entrance. It brought them into a small hall from which opened four small slant-roofed chambers.

"This is my room," Maida said, pointing

to one of the south chambers—the back room on the right of the stairs. "I have always slept there when we have been in the house. I love it because of the great tree outside my window. I have always called this tree, Mother Nature, to go with Father Time. So you see I have a father tree and a mother tree! When there's a storm the boughs make such a sweet sound rubbing against my walls. And often little twigs tap on my window, and sometimes it sounds exactly as though the leaves were whispering to me."

"Oh Maida!" Rosie exclaimed, "I never saw anything so lovely in all my life. How I love that bed and that sweet little cricket."

The room was simple—it held but a big, double, old-fashioned canopied bed; an old-fashioned maple bureau; and an old-fashioned maple desk; a little straight slat-backed chair in front of the desk and a little slat-backed rocker by one of the windows—but it was quaint. In front of the rocker was a cricket as though just ready for little feet.

The flowered wall-paper matched the chintz curtains and the chintz ruffles on the little cricket. Under the window, in a little old-fashioned child's chair, sat a great rag doll, and beside her was a little hair-cloth trunk.

"Yes, it *is* perfectly lovely," Laura agreed, "but oh Maida, do show me my room."

"What a selfish goop I am!" Maida exclaimed in contrition. "Your room, Rosie, is in front of mine, and Laura's across the hall."

The three little girls tumbled pell-mell into the front room. It did not differ much from Maida's or from Laura's across the way—except where the key-note of Maida's wall-paper and chintzes were yellow, that of Rosie's was crimson and Laura's blue. In each there was a double canopied bed; a little old-fashioned bureau; a little old fashioned cricket; two quaint little old-fashioned chairs. But all these things differed in detail and although the rooms showed a similarity, they also showed an individuality. Rosie and Laura went wild with excitement.

"Oh look at my sweet, *sweet* closet!" Laura called from her room. "What a queer shape with the roof slanting like that. And a baby window in it!"

"And the windows," Rosie took it up from her room, "four, eight, twelve, sixteen, *twenty-four panes!* And such queer glass; all full of bubbles and crinkles and wiggle-waggles!"

And the beaming Maida, running frantic-

ally from the one room to the other and from the other to the one, was saying, "Yes, aren't they lovely little closets—running under the eaves like that? I am so glad you like them. I was afraid you would think they were queer. Yes, that's old old glass. All the window glass in the house is old and some of it is such a lovely color."

After a while, the frantic shutting and opening of desk drawers, bureau drawers, and closet drawers, ceased. The *oh's* and *ah's* died down from lack of breath. Maida led the way into the south room at the left. "This is the guest chamber. And now," she added, heading the file through a door at the back of the small hall which led into a big long room, "we're out of the main house and in the Annex. This is the Nursery. It is over the dining room."

The Nursery was a big room with a little bed in each corner; miniature tables and chiffoniers all painted white.

"Molly, Timmie, Dorothy, Mabel," Maida pointed to the four beds. "Delia will sleep in that room at the left with her mother and Betsy in this room at the right with Granny Flynn. You see both these rooms open into the Nursery and Granny Flynn and Mrs.

Dore can keep an eye on what's going on here."

"They'll have to keep two eyes on it—if Betsy's here," Rosie prophesied.

"Now, except for the laundry and some empty rooms in the Annex, I think you've seen everything. Everything, that is, except Floribel's and Zeke's room. I don't suppose you want to see them. And besides I'd have to ask their permission."

"If I see another thing this day," Rosie declared desperately, "I shall die of happiness *this minute.*"

Fortunately however, she was not called upon to gaze on any object which would have resulted in so speedy a demise. For just at that moment the cow-bell rang.

"That's supper," Maida explained.

Reinforcing the cow-bell's call, came Mrs. Dore's voice: "You must come down now, children. Your supper is on the table, all nice and hot."

CHAPTER V

MORNING

THE sun poured through the windows onto Maida's bed. She stirred. Was it a bird calling her? No. It was the phonograph. She peeped out the window. Arthur had brought the phonograph to the opening of the barn door. It was playing, "Bugle Calls of the American Army." It was reveille that she was listening to.

The door to her bed-chamber flew open and Rosie, her heavy curls flying, her black eyes sparkling, precipitated herself across the room. "Oh Maida!" she exclaimed. "Isn't it wonderful? I am not *dreaming* am I? Ow!" as Maida pinched her. "I have been awake for I don't know how long, listening to the birds and everything. I have been waiting ever so long for you to wake up. I thought you would never stir."

"Well now that I'm awake, I'll dress as soon as possible," Maida promised. "We've got a long day before us. Let's go in and get Laura up."

Laura was still deep in slumber Indeed she showed a marked disinclination to awaken. Rosie charitably assisted her efforts by the application to her face of a very wet—and a very cold—sponge. For some reason, this action precipitated a pillow fight. In the midst of it, the breakfast bell sounded but they paid no attention to it. Finally Granny Flynn had to call: "Stop that running about, children, and get dressed. Breakfast'll be on the table in a minute."

When the second bell rang, the boys came in from the barn and the twelve children, Granny Flynn at one end of the table and Mrs. Dore at the other, sat down to a breakfast of fruit, oatmeal, eggs, and all the milk they wanted.

After breakfast, Maida said, "Now, first, I want to show the six little children where's the nicest place for them to play. Do the rest of you want to come?"

The rest *did* want to come. Perhaps Laura voiced their sentiments when she said, "That's a great idea, Maida. Get the little children interested, so they won't be forever tagging us."

Maida led the way to the side of the house—the north. They crossed an expanse of lawn,

came to an opening in the stone wall. Beyond looked like unbroken forest. But from the break in the wall, threading its way through the trees, appeared a well-worn path. They followed it for a few rods. It ended flush against a big sloping rock.

"This," Maida said triumphantly, "is House Rock."

The children swarmed over it.

"Isn't it a beauty!" Rosie exclaimed.

It was a beauty—and especially for play purposes. It was big, cut up by stratification into all levels—but low. At its highest end, it was not three feet from the ground. Trees shaded it; bushes hedged it; mosses padded it. No wonder it had been named House Rock; for it was a perfect setting for those housekeeping games in which little children so delight.

"Now, listen to me, little six," Maida began.

But Arthur interrupted, "Why that's a great name for them—the Little Six. And we," he added triumphantly, "are the Big Six."

"Molly and Mabel and Dorothy and Betsy and Delia and Timmie," Maida started again, "all of you, listen! You are the Little Six. This is your playground. There are some toys

in the house; dolls and doll's dishes and doll's furniture, which you can bring here to play house with. But you are not to go far from the Rock. And when you hear the cow-bell, you must always return to the Little House."

"Is that all," Laura asked eagerly, "and now can we leave the Little Six and go exploring?"

The Little Six waited, dancing with excitement, impatient for the first time in their lives to have the big children go.

"Not yet," Maida responded, "just one more thing for the Little Six."

She led the way around House Rock to its high end. From there another well-worn path started off. The children followed her down its curving way. Not far from House Rock, it came into a big circular enclosure; grassy and surrounded by trees.

"What's this, Maida?" Arthur asked.

"It's a Fairy Ring," Maida answered solemnly.

"A Fairy Ring," Dicky repeated in an awed tone. "Is it really a Fairy Ring?"

"That's what I've always called it," Maida replied. "I don't know what it is, if it isn't a Fairy Ring. I have never seen anything

like it—except in England and there they always call them Fairy Rings, and besides nobody knows what it was used for."

Arthur strolled around the entire circumference of the Ring keenly examining the ground and the surrounding trees.

"It looks like a wood clearing to me," he said in a low tone to Maida when he rejoined the group.

Betsy, silenced for the first time in her five years of experience, suddenly exploded. "Oh goody! goody! goody!" she exclaimed. "Now the fairies will come and play with us. I've always wanted to see a fairy. Now I'm going to see one!"

"I don't believe they's any such things as fairies," Timmie declared sturdily.

"Oh Timmie," Dorothy Clark remonstrated, "I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself. Of course they's fairies."

"Well, anyway," Timmie still sturdily stood his ground, "if they are, I don't believe they'll come and play with us."

"Well, I believe they will," Mabel Clark reinforced her sister.

But Betsy was capering up and down the length and breadth of the Fairy Ring. "I know the fairies will come!" she sang aloud.

"I know the fairies will come! I know the fairies will come!"

When the older children left the Fairy Ring, all six of the little children were capering too. The last thing they heard was Delia's mimicking words: "I know the fairz tum! I know the fairz tum! I know the fairz tum!"

"That's over," Maida said. "I told Granny Flynn," she explained, "that I'd show the little children a nice place to play. Now let's go into the living room and talk. There are a whole lot of things that I've got to tell you that I haven't had time to tell you yet."

Although it was a June day—and as warm and sunny as June knows how to be—they gathered about the big fireplace where already logs were piled and ready to burn. The boys sat on the fender; the girls drew up chairs. After they were all comfortable Maida began.

"Father says that this first week we can all rest. It's to be our vacation, but after that, we've got to work. Father says that there are some things that every girl ought to know how to do and some things every boy ought to know. And we're going to learn those things living in the Little House."

Rosie's eyes danced. "Hurry!" she urged Maida.

Maida drew a long breath. "There's so much of it. You see there's a good deal of work about the house, although it seems so small. Floribel—she's the colored maid—is going to do the cooking and Zeke, her husband, will attend to most of the outside work. Of course Granny Flynn and Mrs. Dore will run everything. But we girls are to take care of our own rooms and the flower garden."

"Oh goody, goody!" Rosie exclaimed, "I love flowers!"

"We are to keep the house decorated with flowers. And once every week, we are to do the housekeeping for the entire day—that's Floribel's and Zeke's day off. That day, we have to plan the meals; do the marketing; cook the food; wash and wipe the dishes."

"Gee, I'm glad I'm not a girl," Harold said jubilantly.

"Oh your turn comes now," Maida declared "You boys have got to weed and water the vegetable garden; gather vegetables whenever they are needed; run errands; take care of the tennis court."

"For my part," Laura declared, "I wish we did *all* the cooking. I love it."

"You wouldn't love it if you did it for

sixteen people," Maida commented in a scandalized tone.

"It's just as though we were all alone by ourselves," Rosie declared jubilantly.

"We are," Maida stated. "We're three miles from the Big House. We shan't see any of father's company. Father has closed one of the roads that leads to the Little House and the other is a secret one that nobody but he and Botkins and I know. Your parents are invited to visit you whenever they wish. Of course father will come to see us occasionally. And let me tell you he will come when we least expect it. And if everything isn't in apple-pie-order— Of course there's the telephone if we should need help—or anything happened— But otherwise we're almost all alone in the world."

"It's like a story book," Dicky commented.

"Maida!" Rosie said, "you speak of a flower garden and a vegetable garden but I don't remember that you showed them to us last night."

"No, I didn't," Maida explained. "We were all getting so tired. But I'll show them to you now. Come!"

She led the way through the living room;

through the dining room to the back door of the house. Then she turned north. "This room is the laundry," she said. "And here," pointing to an enclosure, set off by a high vine-grown lattice, "is the drying yard." They were now walking on a path which ran between the house and a file of cypresses, standing trim and tall and so close that they made a hedge. Maida led the way to the corner where there was an opening. There a great rectangle surrounded by cypresses was a garden—all roses. The bushes were already in rich bloom, great creamy white ones and great pinky white ones. Others were deep pink, golden yellow, a rich dark crimson.

"This is the rose garden," Maida explained. "Beyond," she led the way into still another cypress-guarded square, "is the old-fashioned garden. There are nasturtiums here and phlox and pansies and peonies and lots of other things I can't remember, and in the fall there'll be dahlias and asters."

Rosie shook herself with joy. "I shall love working in this garden," she declared. "This afternoon let's fill all the vases in the house with roses."

"All right," Maida agreed absently. "Now I'm going to show you the vegetable garden."

"I know where that is," Arthur boasted. "I got up early and explored."

Maida led the way past the croquet ground, past the tennis court to another cypress-bordered square. Here, in parallel lines, were rows of green sprouts. The earth must have been turned over in the spring, indeed it might have been turned over in the previous fall, rich loam and cultivator added. It looked like freshly-grated chocolate.

"Gracious, I think I could make fudge of that earth," Rosie exclaimed.

"How tidy it looks," Laura commented.

"Yes," Maida agreed. "That's because the gardener has put it in perfect condition for you boys. But after this, you've got to take care of it yourselves. And weeds grow like—like—" She paused for a comparison.

"Like sixty!" Arthur finished it for her. "I know; I've weeded my aunt's garden in Maine. Believe me it's hot work. The thing to do is to work a little every day—that's the only way you can keep ahead of the weeds."

"Sure, early in the morning!" Dicky remarked.

"How did you know that, Dicky?" Maida asked curiously.

"I just happened to read it in a book," Dicky explained.

"Now, when I tell you," Maida went on, as one suddenly remembering the rest of her instructions, "that we shall have to go to bed at nine and get up at seven, I have told you all I have to tell you. Father's very strict about our sleep. He says we must have ten hours. There's one exception. Saturday night, when we can sit up until ten and Sunday morning when we can sleep until eight. Now, how would you like to go to the Magic Mirror?"

"Oh I've been on pins and needles every moment since we got up wanting to go to that Pond," Rosie declared, "but then I want to see everything at once."

"Arthur, do you know how to row a canoe?" Dicky asked.

"No, I don't," Arthur admitted.

"I do," said Harold with a slight accent of superiority, "but you don't *row* a canoe. You row a *boat* and you *paddle* a canoe."

"Does it take long to learn?" Dicky asked with great interest.

"No, and it's as easy as pie when you get the hang of it, but you fall overboard a hundred times before you do that."

"I can't swim," Dicky said disconsolately.

"Never mind, Dicky," Maida comforted him, "you'll soon learn. Can you swim Rosie?"

"Yes. I'll teach you Dicky. You begin first with water wings and then—"

In the meantime, following Maida's lead, they were moving north.

"Hi!" Arthur remonstrated. "The way to the Pond—I mean the Magic Mirror—is over in that direction."

"This is another way to it," Maida explained. "Once you've taken it, you'll never take any other."

A little path disengaged itself from the trees which fringed the lawn, began to wind away, almost hidden, among the trees. The children followed Maida in Indian file. For a few moments they could hear Granny Flynn calling to the younger children; then the voices gradually died away; bird voices took their places; the calm and the hush of the deep forest fell upon them.

"Oh isn't it wonderful!" Rosie said in an awed tone. "It makes me feel like— It makes me feel like— Well, it's like being in church."

On both sides the fresh green of the trees made an intricate screen through which the

sunlight poured and splashed. The birds kept up their calls; and many insects called too. A bee buzzed through a tiny interval of silence; then a crow cawed. The road turned, dipped, sank.

"Isn't this pretty?" Maida exclaimed as they descended into a hollow with high, thick, blossoming wild-rose bushes on both sides.

Involuntarily, the Big Six stopped and looked about them. They stood in a little dimple in the earth—bushes growing thick and high on its sides.

"How hot it is down here," Laura commented, "and how sweet it smells."

"I call it the Bosky Dingle," Maida explained.

"What does Bosky Dingle mean?" Dicky enquired.

"It's a poetry phrase," Maida told him. "It means a kind of woody hollow."

"There's the Pond!" called the practical Harold.

The children broke into a run.

They came out on a cleared space with a boat-house and a long jetty, leading from a newly-shingled shed into the water. "This is for the canoes," Maida explained. She un-

locked the door and showed a single wide empty room.

"Oh let's go home and get the canoes and bring them down here," Arthur explained. "I'm wild to try them."

"It will take two to carry each canoe," Harold explained, "and we need bathing suits."

"There are bathing suits at home for all of us," Maida explained. "Shall we turn back?" She asked this question politely, but she said it a little reluctantly.

Rosie seemed to see her reluctance.

"Did you have another plan, Maida?" Rosie demanded.

"Well you see," Maida answered slowly, "there's a gypsy camp half way round the Magic Mirror and I thought you might like to visit it."

CHAPTER VI

AFTERNOON

"A GYPSY camp!" Arthur repeated. "Sure I'd love to go."

"Gypsies!" Laura shrank a little. "I think I'd be scared of gypsies."

"You wouldn't be scared of these gypsies," Maida promised. "I've known them ever since I was a little girl. I am very fond of them."

"Well let's go," Arthur said, shifting from one foot to another in impatient excitement.

The procession started again.

"Tell us more about the gypsies, Maida," Arthur demanded at once.

"There isn't very much to tell, except that they've come here every summer ever since I can remember and, indeed, long before I was born. Father has always permitted them to camp on this ground, rent free. I don't seem to remember much about them when I was very little, except that I used to go and buy baskets with Granny Flynn and they always told Granny's fortune. 'Cross my palm with sil-

ver,' they say. That means, 'Put some money in my hand!' "

"How many are there?" Dicky enquired.

"Not many. Perhaps a dozen. Let me see there's Aunt Save and Uncle Save the father and mother, and Aunt Vashti, the old, old grandmother. She would frighten even you, Rosie— She looks like a witch. But she's very kind and I'm very fond of her. And there's Esther and Miriam, their daughters and Hector and Tom, their husbands; and their children. And then there are always three or four relatives—different ones every year—who come up from the South with them."

"They go South then every winter?" Arthur continued.

"Yes," Maida answered. She continued to give them her memories of the gypsies through the rest of the long, shaded, greenly-winding walk, and the children asked many questions. Presently the trail expanded ahead into a clearing.

"There they are!" Arthur called.

The clearing was surrounded by pines. Against this background, a group of tents pointed their weather-stained pyramids up from the brown pine-needles. In the middle,

a fire was burning. A black pot, hanging from a triangle of stout sticks, emitted a cloud of steam and a busy bubbling. A wagon stood off among the trees and tethered by a long rope two horses were feeding. A trio of hounds, two old and one young, rose as the children approached; made slowly in their direction. An old woman, so wrinkled that her face looked as though it could never have been smooth, with great hoops of gold in her ears, a red kerchief on her head and a black one around her neck, stood watching the pot. A little distance off, a younger woman, buxom and brown, mended. Three men, one middle-aged, two younger, sat smoking.

"Those dogs won't bite us Maida," Laura said in a panic, "will they?"

"Oh no," Maida said, "they know me. Hi Lize! Hi Tige!" she called. The hounds burst into a run; came bounding to her side; leaped up and licked her face. Maida staggered under the onslaught, but Arthur expertly seized their collars, held them.

The excitement in the gypsy camp was immediate. "It's Maida!" ran a murmur from mouth to mouth. The young woman leaped to her feet. The old woman, less alert but still nimble, sprang from the grass also. They

all, even the men, came forward, smiling eagerly. Maida shook hands with them and introduced her friends.

"When did you get here?" Maida asked. "I've had Zeke come down here every day for a week looking for you—every day until yesterday, when in the excitement of our arrival, he neglected to come."

"We came yesterday," they explained. They were most of them, dark, with longish hair and flashing dark eyes but their look was very friendly. They asked Maida a multitude of questions about her father and Granny Flynn, her trip abroad. Finally Maida asked them if they had any baskets ready for sale.

"A few," Mrs. Savory said looking pleased. "Oh Silva, bring the baskets out! Maida you have never seen Silva and Tyma, have you? They're my sister's children. My sister died last summer and now they're living with us."

A voice answered, "In a moment." It was a child's voice and yet it had a curious grown-up accent as of an unusual decision of character. The doors of one of the tents parted and a girl's head appeared in the opening. The children stared at her. For an instant nobody spoke. The head disappeared. When the girl emerged, her hands were full

of baskets. Behind her came a lad very li
her but older.

Silva Burle was a slender brown girl. She did not look any older than Rosie; but she was much taller—and she was as tawny as Rosie was dark. Her hair, a strange amber color, hung straight to her shoulders where the ends turned upwards, not in a curl, but in a big soft wave. Her eyes were not big but they were long; they were like bits of shining amber set under her thin straight brows. Her skin was a tanned amber too. She wore a much-patched rusty dark skirt with a white middy blouse, a tattered, yellow-ribbon tie.

Tyma, her brother, was slim too but strong-looking, active. He had a dark skin and hair so black that there was a purple steeliness about it. In all this swarthy coloring, his eyes, a clear blue, seemed strange and unexpected. His brows were thick and they lowered as the eyes under them contemplated the group of children. Silva's lips curled disdainfully upwards.

Silva nodded briefly when her aunt performed the simple introduction, "This is Maida and her friends, Silva," but Tyma merely stared. Then turning his back, he strolled away to where the horses were feeding; untethered one of them. With a single

leap of his athletic body, he was on its back. In another instant, the green leaves of the forest closed around him as he disappeared riding bare-back into it.

"What beautiful baskets you have Silva!" Maida said politely.

Silva did not deign to answer. She spread her handiwork out on the table which stood not far from the fire and then, leaving her prospective customers to their choice, went over to the fire; sat down before it, her back to the children.

Aunt Save seemed to feel dimly that something was wrong. She moved over to the table and began displaying the baskets.

Maida made an effort to relieve her embarrassment. "Oh Aunt Save," she said, "what do you suppose is the first thing I am going to do when I get time?" Without waiting for an answer, she went swiftly on. "I'm going to wash and iron all Lucy's clothes and pack them nicely away in a little old hair-cloth trunk which I found in the attic. Lucy," she explained to her friends, "is a great big rag-baby doll that Aunt Save made for me when I was little. It's as big as a baby two years old. I was fonder of it than any doll I have ever had, and so Granny Flynn made it a whole outfit of clothes—all the things a baby should have.

I am going to pack them away and keep them for my daughter."

"Oh, do you mean that rag-baby doll that's sitting in the little chair in your room?" Rosie asked. "And that little queer brown trunk under the window where the tree is?"

This slant of the conversation seemed to interest Silva for she turned a little; listened intently to what followed.

"Yes, that's Lucy," Maida answered. "All her clothes are in that trunk."

"When I made that doll for you," Aunt Save said, "I didn't think you'd play with it long. None of us thought you were going to live."

"That was before my illness," Maida explained to the other children, "when I was so lame."

"I told your father," Aunt Save went on, "that there was only one thing that could save you. And that was to go South and live with us in the piny woods and be a little Romany for a year. But he couldn't seem to let you go for so long."

"Oh Aunt Save!" Maida exclaimed. "How I would have loved that! However it all came out right because father gave me my Little Shop and I made all these new friends."

CHAPTER VII

TWILIGHT

"I THINK that Silva Burle was just horrid!" Rosie burst out suddenly. "Just horrid!" she repeated with an enraged accent. "I never took such a dislike to a girl in my life. I just simply despise her!"

The three little girls were in the rose garden. It was just after luncheon and Granny Flynn had said they must do something in the way of quiet exercise, before they went to swim in the Magic Mirror. They had decided to decorate the house with flowers.

"She was rather horrid, wasn't she?" Maida agreed absently. "So was her brother."

"You expect boys to have bad manners," Laura commented scathingly, "but a girl ought to behave herself better than that. She made me so mad I wanted to stick my tongue out at her."

"I wanted to box her ears," announced Rosie fiercely.

"She seemed to take such a dislike to us—

just on sight!" Maida went on. "I don't understand it. We didn't do anything to her. We—"

"Why we'd never even seen her before," Rosie interrupted in a crescendo of irritation.

"She acted as though," Maida went straight on, "she was afraid of us for some reason, as though she thought we were going to do—" She paused—"well I don't know what," she concluded.

"I hope we never see the disagreeable thing again," Laura said.

"We probably will," Maida declared. "We'll be going to the gypsy camp all the time, but of course she won't come to the Little House."

"If she does," Rosie threatened, "I'll tell her to go home."

Rosie looked cross and she was cross. Ever since the return from the gypsy camp her tempestuous brows had not smoothed out their knots. Her eyes alternately burned and flashed and her cheeks were like red roses on fire.

Characteristically—because she wore red whenever she could—Rosie had gathered only the crimson roses. She held a great bunch of them now, and she stood stripping them of

their thorns. Laura's roses were pink; Maida's yellow.

"I should think this would be enough," Maida suggested in a moment. "Let's put them in the vases."

"Shall we mix them all together?" Rosie asked. "One color to each room is really prettier. Just think how lovely the living room will be with these great red roses everywhere."

"Rosie, you shall decide where the flowers go to-day, and the next time Laura, and the next time me. That's the only fair way," Maida declared.

Indoors, Maida took them to the long closet lined with shelves, lighted by one window and furnished with a small sink, a table and three chairs, which she called the Flower Closet. On the shelves were vases and bowls of all colors and sizes; some high and slender; some squatty and low; of glass and china. For a few minutes conversation languished. The three little girls were all busy making their selection from these receptacles; cutting away too long stems and too heavy foliage; removing thorns.

Rosie as usual—her movements were always as swift as lightning—finished her work

first. She came into the living room where Maida and Laura—the result of Laura's idea—were trying bunches of yellow roses in low jars against bunches of pink ones in high ones.

"I wish I could get that Silva Burle out of my mind," Rosie burst out with a sudden return of her irritation. "I keep thinking of her and I get so mad I'd just like to—"

"Granny says we can go down to the Pond now," Arthur called suddenly, popping in the door. "We boys have been lugging the three canoes down to the Magic Mirror and believe me it's some hot work. Granny says that we must put on our bathing suits here to-day."

Boys and girls raced to their rooms. In a surprisingly brief time they were back again in bathing suits and bathing shoes; the girls with rubber caps in brilliant colors.

"Granny says, as Dicky's the only one that can't swim, we must all promise to look after him," Arthur added warningly on their way to the Pond.

"I can look after myself," Dicky remarked huffily.

"I'm only telling you what Granny said," Arthur stated. Apparently Granny had put

other responsibilities on him because he went on. "I know you swim in deep water, Rosie, because I've seen you, and you too Harold. But how about you Laura?"

"Well—I'll show you," Laura promised caustically.

"You'll have to," Arthur told her, "before I'll let you go over your head." He turned to Maida. "How about you?"

"I'm not a fast swimmer nor a strong one," Maida declared, "but I am quite accustomed to deep water. I used to go over the side of the yacht with father every morning in the Mediterranean, and I can swim forever without getting tired out."

"All right," Arthur said. And then, "All in that's going in!" he shouted suddenly as the jetty came in sight. He burst into a run and the file of children raced after him. Over into the water they went in five tempestuous dives. Only Dicky remained watching them. They came up almost simultaneously. Arthur and Harold, as a matter of natatorial compliment, threw into each other's faces the mud and weeds they had brought up in their hands. Then they all struck for the middle of the Pond. They swam with varying degrees of speed—Arthur first as became his superior

size and strength, his superior skill at all things. Curiously enough Laura, who cut through the water like a thrown knife, kept a close second to him. The others struggled behind, Maida always in the rear.

They turned over and stared into the shining sky.

"Now tell us a story Maida!" Rosie said.

Maida began obediently. "Once upon a time," she said to the accompaniment of five pairs of hands beating the water, "there lived a little girl by the name of Rosie. She was probably the naughtiest little girl in the world—"

"How about Silva Burle?" Rosie interrupted quickly. "You forget her."

"I'll tell you what you *do* forget," Laura took it up, "poor Dicky standing there all alone on the pier."

"Gee," was all Arthur said, but he turned and swam back, the rest following him.

"I'm going to give you your first swimming lesson now," Arthur called to the disconsolate figure watching them. Arthur swam in shore. He commanded Dicky to wade into the pond up to his waist.

"Now," he said, putting one hand under Dicky's chin, "drop down slowly until you're

lying flat on the water. "I'll hold you by the chin and by your bathing suit in the back. Now listen! You're to do exactly what I tell you. You'll think I'm going to drop you but I cross my throat I won't. But you see that you follow my directions."

In a few minutes Dicky was paddling frantically, his eyes almost bulging out of his head, his lips pursed together; his waving arms and kicking feet beating the water almost to a lather. "Breathe the way you always do!" Arthur was shouting. "You poor fish, open your mouth. Suppose you do swallow some water. It won't hurt you. Haven't you ever drunk any water in your life? Don't kick up and down. Make your legs go the way a frog's does. Don't go so *fast*. Now I'll count for you. One! Two! Three! Four! Breathe, you poor prune! How do you expect you're going to swim without any breath in your body?"

The others paddled about, adding their jeers or suggestions; but at times they frequently deserted for a longer swim. Laura displayed a number of water tricks—she was as graceful in her swimming as in her dancing and for a short dash she could go fast. She dove forward, sideways, and backwards. She sat

upright in the water. She turned over and over in a somersault. Her strength was nothing to that of Rosie's however, who seemed never to tire of any physical exercise.

"That will be enough for to-day, Dicky," Arthur decided finally. "Now put on these water wings and practice the way I've been telling you. Breathe the way you always do and don't go too fast. Don't go into deep water yet. If the wings should fall off or bust—"

"Burst!" corrected Rosie promptly.

"Collapse," Arthur substituted with unexpected elegance, "you'll sink like a stone."

"I'll stay near the shore," Dicky promised docilely. "You bet," he added, "I don't want to make a hole in the water."

Shaking off his pedagogical duties, Arthur set off alone for the middle of the Pond, swimming with the long powerful strokes which characterized him, his head almost under water.

"What a stroke he has!" Maida commented admiringly. "I'd give anything if I could cut through the water like that. Why—why who's that?"

Two heads appeared bobbing on the water at

the other side of the lake. No one of the children had seen anybody emerge from the woods. The strangers must have come around the curve. The heads came forward straight towards the middle of the lake. Arthur had reached his goal; was floating placidly, his arms folded at the back of his neck. Involuntarily, the other children stood silent and watched. Nearer the two heads came to Arthur—nearer and nearer. One of them had thick tossed black hair; the other lighter hair, satiny as the inside of a nut where the sun caught it on the top of the head; wet and dark as strings of seaweed in the neck.

"It's Silva and Tyma Burle," Rosie exclaimed suddenly. "Oh how they can swim!"

The two young gypsies had drawn near enough to Arthur for the children to measure their progress.

"I never saw a girl swim like that," Laura said with a touch of envy. "She swims just like a boy."

Arthur, his ears sunk below the level of the water, had apparently heard nothing. But now suddenly he threw himself on his side and paddling just enough to keep afloat, watched the approaching pair in amazement.

On the Burles came, their eyes fixed on Arthur, their expressions quite non-committal. Arthur waited.

Suddenly a terrible thing happened! Silva threw up her hands and screamed. Tyma, a little in advance, turned and swam to her rescue, but once he had reached his sister's side she caught him about the neck. It was all over in a second. The two sank together. The children on the jetty shrieked. Maida burst into tears. Harold started out at once for the fatal spot. Rosie made as though to follow him.

"Don't Rosie," Laura said with sudden coolness. "You'll only be in the way."

In the meantime, Arthur swam instantly for the spot where brother and sister had disappeared. He dived at once; staying under the water for what, to the frightened group on shore, seemed an incredible time. But he came up; filled his lungs with air; dived again. For the third time he appeared on the surface. For the third time he dived.

Suddenly many rods away on the top of the water appeared two heads—Silva's and Tyma's. Simultaneously Arthur came up gasping for air. The Burles managed to wave a hand; broke into high jeering laughter;

then swam rapidly towards the other shore. By this time, Harold had reached Arthur's side. Together they started after the practical jokers but both the boys were spent with their first long swim of the year. After a while, they turned and rejoined their friends on the shore.

"Can you beat that?" Arthur demanded. His face had taken on the black look that rage, with him, always developed. Rosie's eyes darted lightnings. Maida had stopped crying and her eyes had changed too. Not glowering like Rosie's, they had grown suddenly dark. Laura looked stupefied. Dicky had turned white. Great shadows jumped out under his eyes.

"That was the most dreadful thing I ever saw in my life," Maida asserted in a voice almost a whisper. "You might have drowned, Arthur."

"I'll get even with them for that," Arthur said in a quiet voice. "You wait."

"I don't blame you," Rosie declared. "I'm so mad I don't know what I wouldn't do."

"I don't believe they're worth taking any notice of," Laura decided contemptuously, "gypsies like that. Why don't you tell their aunt, Maida?"

"I'd like to," Maida answered, "but I guess I won't. I like Aunt Save too much."

"Anyway," Harold pointed out, "it isn't anything that concerns them. It's all between us children."

"No, I wouldn't want any grown people to get mixed up in this at all," Arthur said. "I wouldn't say anything about it to Granny Flynn or Mrs. Dore. It'll only worry them and nobody's the worse for it. We didn't do anything to be ashamed of anyway."

"Ashamed of!" Rosie echoed stormily. "You were only trying to save their lives."

"No," Maida agreed, "I won't say anything about it. I think you're right Arthur."

The Burles had reached the opposite shore by this time. Before they disappeared into the woods, they raised their voices in a long derisive shout.

As Arthur listened his face grew blacker and blacker. "Do all the yelling you want!" he called, "I'll get even with you, my fine young gypsies!"

CHAPTER VIII

NIGHT

THE women were too busy to take any notice of the children when they returned except to ask them if they had a good swim.

"I feel like reading," Maida said with a determined air. She marched into the library. "There's a book here I haven't read for a long time, *At the Back of the North Wind.*" She went on as though talking to herself. "It's one of the loveliest stories I ever read. I don't know but what it's my favorite of all. I feel like reading it now. It's so cool . . . there's a great beautiful woman in it . . . the North Wind. . . ." Her voice melted into silence, as her hand seized a worn brown book. She dropped into one of the big chairs; seemed to forget entirely about her companions.

The others—partly because there seemed nothing else to do—followed her example.

"Oh, here's *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth!*" Dicky announced joyously. "I haven't seen it since Maida took it to Europe." He absorbed himself in the big thick volume.

Rosie and Laura contented themselves respectively with *Little Men* and *Little Women,* and Harold began for the third time *Kidnapped.* But Arthur found a newly published book describing the exploration of Africa in a flying machine. He pored over it; gradually became absorbed.

It had been late afternoon when they returned. Nearly an hour drifted by. That coolness, which announces the approach of dusk, set in.

"Well," Maida said at last, breathing a long relieved sigh, "I've got rid of my temper. If I hadn't taken a book when I did, I'm sure I'd have burst into pieces. If everybody has read all he wants to, let's try the tennis court."

They tried the tennis court (although only Maida and the two Lathrops played tennis) but to such good effect and with so great a fascination that they returned to it after supper. Arthur, as was to be expected with his coolness and game sense, progressed rapidly under Harold's instructions. The others found it the most difficult thing they had ever attempted. They were hot and tired when finally approaching dark made it impossible for them to see the balls.

They adjourned to the Tree Room where, in hammock and chairs, they talked and talked.

Gradually the talk grew desultory; sank to an occasional silence.

"I was rummaging about in the barn early this morning," Arthur said out of the reflective quiet in which he had long been immersed, "and I found all kinds of things in a big chest —base-balls and bats; foot-ball stuff and boxing gloves. Do you know how to box, Harold?"

"No," Harold replied, "never tried it."

"Want to learn?" Arthur inquired. "I'll teach you. I'd like the practice."

"Sure," Harold said. "When will we begin?"

"To-morrow," Arthur responded.

"What do you want to practice boxing for, Arthur?" Rosie asked curiously.

"Oh I thought I might need it sometime," Arthur answered evasively. He smiled into the dark.

"Say!" Rosie burst out suddenly, "did anybody besides me get sun-burned to-day?"

"Well, I didn't mention it," Laura answered sleepily, "but I feel as if my face were on fire."

"Oh! Oh!" Maida exclaimed contritely.

"I forgot to warn you to be sure to wear hats this first day or two. Are you burnt, Arthur?"

"To a cinder," Arthur declared, "but I've been burnt before. I don't mind it so very much."

"And you Dicky?" Maida went on.

Dicky's answer was a grimace.

"And Harold?" Maida continued in a despairing voice.

"I shall be one big blister to-morrow," Harold prophesied grimly.

"Oh my goodness!" wailed Maida futilely. "It's all my fault. Well it's half-past eight," she added after a pause. "According to rules we can sit up until nine, but I'm going to bed now. I never was so tired in all my life."

"I'm falling asleep where I am," Rosie admitted, "and as for Laura, she *is* asleep."

This was the first day at the Little House.

CHAPTER IX

PLANS

"NOW," Maida announced at breakfast a week later, "we've had all the vacation we're going to get—at least all that the Big Six get. To-morrow begins our work. Father said we could plan it ourselves how it was to be done and unless our plans were bad ones, we could keep right on with them. Now I propose that, right after breakfast, you boys go to the barn and make a program of your work. We girls will stay here and make a program for ourselves. You remember what it is you're expected to do?" Notwithstanding protests that they remembered everything, she recited briefly again to the boys the list of their duties.

After breakfast, as directed, the Big Six divided. The boys proceeded to the barn. The girls settled themselves in the big, comfortable living-room, began to discuss the work that they were to do. Rosie, in some inexplicable way, soon took control; was handling the situation in the practical, efficient way that was typical of her.

"Do you know how to make a bed, Maida?" she asked.

"No," Maida answered dolefully, "I never made one in my life. It looks easy though."

"It's easy to make a bed *badly*," Rosie said with emphasis. "How about you Laura?"

"Well," Laura replied slowly, "I *have* made one."

Rosie groaned. "I know what it will look like," she commented. "Now I *can* make a bed," she boasted. "Right after we finish this, I'll take you upstairs and show you both. Now, how about cooking?"

Maida looked aghast. "I never cooked anything in my life."

"That's what I thought," Rosie remarked grimly. "How about cooking, Laura?"

"I can make pop-overs, one-two-three-four cake and cup-custard," Laura stated proudly. "And, oh yes, fudge!"

"Is that all?" Rosie asked scornfully.

"Yes," Laura admitted.

"Can either of you make a fire?" Rosie went on.

Two meek *noes* were the answer.

"Well, as far as I can see," Rosie decided, "we've got to begin at the very beginning. Now I've been thinking this matter over and

it seems to me there's only one fair way of doing it and that is for us to weed the flower garden *all together* every morning; each one of us to take care of their own room—"

"*Her* own room," Maida corrected. She added roguishly, "I thought you were beginning to feel too important, Rosie."

"All right, smarty-cat! *Her* own room. Then when it comes to Floribel's day out, we'll take turns in planning the three meals. But every Thursday, one of us must have the day in charge. On that day the other two are only assistants."

"Rosie," Maida exclaimed, "I think you are perfectly wonderful! That seems to me to be absolutely all right. Don't you think so, Laura?"

"Yes," Laura answered equally enthusiastic, "I think it's marvelous."

"Well, then," Rosie began again, "let's begin to plan meals for this Thursday."

They were deep in this interesting task when the boys returned from the barn. They compared plans.

The boys' plan did not differ so very much from the girls' except that, when it came to the work in the vegetable garden they had decided to weed in rotation. Also in rotation,

they were to sprinkle garden and tennis court nightly, to roll the tennis court daily. Each boy was to make his own bed. There was a typewriter in the library and they spent the next half-hour typing out these plans and making as many copies as there were children. Then they pinned them up in their rooms.

"Say," Arthur declared suddenly, "you girls have got to show us how to make a bed. I supppose I could make one, after a fashion, but I never have. I don't know how to begin."

"I do," said Harold unexpectedly. "I learned how to make beds last summer at camp. I'll show you."

"Show us now," Arthur demanded.

The three boys started in the direction of the barn.

"Let's go too," Rosie whispered. "Isn't it a joke to think of boys trying to make beds? I'd like to see the bed after Harold has finished with it."

The girls tagged the boys; followed them upstairs into the barn.

At once Harold began in the most business-like way to strip the bed. It was apparent that on arising he had pulled the covers back to air. Then with swift, efficient movements, he began to re-make it.

"Goodness!" Rosie exclaimed humbly in a moment, "I can't make a bed as well as that. I'm going to learn too."

Indeed, the bed looked like a mathematical problem which had just been solved, and as Harold proceeded to clean up the room in the way he had learned at camp, the others followed him with respectful glances. Harold tidied the three chiffoniers and the three closets. When he finished, the room had a look of military perfection.

"Now," he commanded, "Arthur you make your bed and Dicky you make yours; I'll supervise the job."

"I'm going right back to my room and remake my bed, Harold," Maida declared. "It looks at though somebody had driven an automobile over it."

"I will too," admitted the humbled Rosie. "Think of having a boy teach you how to make a bed!"

The boys rejoined the girls after a while and again they went over their plans. In the midst of it all, Granny Flynn came in to see what was keeping them so quiet. They showed her the typewritten schedules and she approved them highly. "They ought to work like a charm," she averred.

And indeed, it seemed as though her prophecy were a true one. About the same hour the next morning, twin alarm-clocks rang out; one in the barn, another in Maida's room. Very soon after, a sleepy boy—Arthur had volunteered for the first day in the garden—emerged from the barn; three sleepy girls from the house. They weeded busily for half an hour. In the meantime, another sleepy boy was rolling the tennis court which had been hosed the night before. Then came breakfast. Immediately after breakfast, rooms were made speckless.

With the girls, this continued to be a kind of game. They not only prided themselves on keeping their chambers clean, but they actually tried to match the flowers they placed there to the chintzes and wall-papers.

"It's fun to take care of these darling rooms," Rosie declared again and again. "They're so little I feel as though we ought to buy a doll's broom and a doll's carpet-sweeper and a doll's dust-pan and brush. I never saw such sweet furniture in all my life, and how I love the roof slanting down like that!"

"I feel that way too—exactly as though I

were putting a doll's house in order," Laura coincided happily.

As for the boys—they bothered with no flowers. Indeed a military plainness prevailed in the barn. This of course meant also a military neatness to which no one of them was accustomed but Harold. Harold constituted himself critic-in-chief. And he proved a stern critic indeed. He would not permit the sheets on the bed to deviate one hair's breadth from perfect horizontality or absolute verticality. A bit of paper on the floor elicited an immediate rebuke. He even stipulated the exact spots on the chiffonier-tops where brush, comb and mirror were to be kept and he saw that the other boys kept them there. The victims of his passion for military order had to roll their pajamas in a certain way and put them in a certain place. A similar neatness characterized the closets. Coats and trousers had to be hung on special hangers; ties on special hooks. As for bureau drawers—Harold maintained that there was a place for everything and woe to Dicky or Arthur when everything was not in its place.

Immediately after the rooms were done in

the morning came errands. The first morning, Granny let the Big Six do all the marketing, even what could have been done over the telephone; so that they could get to know where the shops were. They proceeded on their bicycles, with Maida for a guide, to Satuit Center. Maida took them to the Post Office; to the butcher; the grocer; the coal-man; the wood-man; the hardware shop; the ice cream establishment—even to the little dry-goods shops and to the cobbler. She introduced them to all these village authorities.

"After to-day," Maida explained, "we'll have to do only part of Granny's marketing for her. And only one of us need attend to it."

"Oh let's do it every day—and all together," Dicky burst out impulsively.

"You think you'll enjoy that because it's new to you," Maida laughed, "but you'll soon get tired of it. No, we'd better take turns."

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday went by. More and more certainly Granny Flynn's prophecy seemed on the way to be proved true. The twin sets of plans worked perfectly. It looked as though the summer were going by without a hitch. Then came Thursday—Floribel's and Zeke's day out.

CHAPTER X

RESPONSIBILITY

REALLY, as Rosie pointed out, the work for Floribel's and Zeke's day out began the morning before. You had to make sure then that there was enough raw material in the house for the three meals of the next day. Therefore, early Wednesday morning before they went to market, the three girls sat down at the typewriter and worked out the program of their three meals.

"Rosie, you take charge of this first day," Maida urged, "you've had so much more experience than Laura or me. Don't you think she ought, Laura?"

"I certainly do," Laura agreed with conviction. "Thank goodness, breakfast is always easy. It's fruit, and breakfast food and eggs. Thank goodness too, that fruit grows already made. Just think how much work it would be if we had to cook oranges and peaches, or if we had to shell berries. And what a blessing milk is! How nice of the cow to deliver it all cooked."

"Well, then," Rosie began, taking the situation in hand at once, "let's start with fruit. Let's have oranges—"

"Oh let's!" interrupted Maida excitedly, "I know a perfectly beautiful way to prepare oranges. You cut the skins into quarters and then into eighths while they're still on the orange. You don't pull them off, but you turn them back, so that the orange stands in the midst of petals of its own peel—just like a gold pond-lily."

"All except Delia's orange," Laura put in. "I notice that Mrs. Dore gives her orange juice. And after she has squeezed it, she strains it very carefully."

"All right, Laura," Rosie agreed again, at once, "you can attend to the oranges."

"I think we'd better have prepared breakfast-food this first breakfast," Maida suggested. "We are bound to make a lot of mistakes in cooking; but we can't hurt anything that just comes out of a box."

"Yes, you're right, Maida," Rosie agreed. "Now, shall we have an omelette? I know how to cook omelettes. No, I guess we'd better have boiled eggs. They're the easiest, and I don't want to make any mistakes the first day if possible."

"Well that settles breakfast," Maida declared with satisfaction. "Now what are we going to have for dinner?"

"I'd like to have a fish chowder," Rosie suggested. "We haven't had one this summer. Most everybody likes chowder. And then," she added with a smile, "it's the only thing I know how to cook."

"Then we'll have it, Rosie," Maida decided.

"I'll teach you to how to make chowder if you like," Rosie offered.

"Oh will you, Rosie?" Maida asked ecstatically. "I love fish chowder. I've never in all my life had enough. How I would enjoy making it."

"And then," Rosie continued, "for dessert, we'll have a bread pudding. It's the only pudding I know how to make."

Laura drew a long breath, "What'll we eat next Thursday?" she asked in a serious tone. "I don't know how to cook anything but popovers and custards and cake. Maida doesn't know how to cook anything at all. And you are cooking, this first Thursday, everything you know."

Rosie sighed too. "Well we'll consider next Thursday when it comes," she decided wisely, "and besides Granny and Mrs. Dore

or Floribel will teach us how to cook anything —they said they would. And now we come to supper."

However supper was not so easy for Laura as for the other two, because Rosie immediately decided that Laura should make some of her one-two-three-four cake. The rest of the meal was to be bread and butter, some of the preserves left over from the year before, with which the house was richly provided; and great pitchers of milk.

"We've got to do the cooking for this whole day ourselves," Maida sighed. "There isn't a thing in which the boys can help us."

"No," Rosie admitted regretfully, "and I wanted to make them work too. Next week," she added, "they'll be busy enough because we'll have ice cream and they'll have to turn the freezer."

The girls pinned up their schedule of meals on the kitchen wall; set the alarm clock for an incredibly early hour; went to bed at eight, instead of nine, very serene in their minds.

The record of their first day was probably as good and as bad as that of most amateur cooks. In the early morning, the little girls moved so noiselessly about the big kitchen and

talked in such low tones that Mrs. Dore said she had not heard a sound until the breakfast bell rang. The first two courses of breakfast went off beautifully. Then they discovered they had boiled the eggs twelve minutes. Granny declared that they must eat them because eggs were expensive. Perhaps it was to take away the sting from this mistake that Mrs. Dore remarked that she had never seen oranges look so beautiful as these—in their curled golden calyxes.

When it came to luncheon, there were mistakes again; but not such serious ones. Rosie's chowder was hot and perfectly delicious; only there wasn't enough of it. Rosie herself nobly went without; but the children clamored for more. On the other hand, she had made enough bread pudding for a family twice their size. Here the boys eagerly came to the rescue and demanded three helpings each.

Supper was very successful. Granny Flynn and Mrs. Dore congratulated Rosie warmly upon it.

"Well I didn't make any mistakes for this meal," Rosie said dryly, "because there wasn't anything that I cooked."

However Granny continued to praise the three tired little girls.

"It's foine little cooks you'll make," she prophesied.

In the glow that this praise developed, they washed and wiped the dishes, chattering like magpies. And then, following the impulse which emerged from that happy glow, they cleaned up Floribel's kitchen; re-arranged and re-decorated it.

They re-arranged and re-decorated to such good purpose that, the next day, Floribel said privately to Mrs. Dore. "It sho do look beautiful. Ah'se never seen a kitchen lak it, but Ah can't find a *single thing.*"

CHAPTER XI

VISITORS

AFTER the second Thursday, which was Floribel's and Zeke's day out, came the second Saturday of the children's stay in the Little House, and on that Saturday all the parents came to Satuit from Charlestown to see how their children were getting on: Mr. and Mrs. Brine, Mr. and Mrs. Lathrop, Mr. and Mrs. Clark, Mr. and Mrs. Doyle, Mr. and Mrs. Hale. Arthur had no mother but Mr. Duncan appeared with the rest. Mr. Westabrook appeared at odd moments and helped entertain the guests. The children of these parents were so excited that Maida and Dicky lamented loudly that they had no relatives to show the Little House. This was before the train which brought all these guests arrived. Afterwards, they had no time to regret anything. The hospitality of the Little House was stretched to its furthest expansion. The boys, bunking in tents, hastily erected on the lawn, gave up their beds to their fathers. The girls, sleeping on extra cots in the nursery, gave up

their beds to their mothers. This did not take care of the entire company. All the rooms in the Annex were filled.

It was a two days, equally busy for hosts and guests. The children were determined to show their parents everything and the parents were equally determined to see everything. One instant Mr. and Mrs. Doyle could be seen being dragged off by Molly and Timmie to view House Rock; the next, Mr. and Mrs. Clark, herded by the twins, were being pulled in the direction of the Fairy Ring. Laura and Rosie displayed every detail of house and barn to their parents. Arthur took his father on two long explorations through the woods. Betsy celebrated the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Hale by her first attempt to run house and the Magic Mirror, and brought back away. She was caught half way between the in triumph, her big eyes sparkling with the mischief which always filled them when she was successful in accomplishing her purpose.

Perhaps though, Granny Flynn and Mrs. Dore enjoyed more than anybody this break in their country life; for a happy smile never left Granny's wrinkled face, and Mrs. Dore talked to the visitors all day long.

The company left on a late Sunday after-

noon train with an invitation to come every future week-end; and it looked as though life in the Little House would go on as usual.

However, Monday proved to be an equally exciting day as the two which had preceded it. For when the children—Big Six and Little Six—came back from their swim in the afternoon, they saw, lying placidly on the lawn, the figure of a strange man—asleep or awake they could not at first make out.

The figure decided that for them by leaping to its feet in what seemed one athletic jerk.

"It's Billy Potter!" shrieked Maida.

"Billy!" "Billy!" "Billy!" the others made chorus. And they raced over to his side; threw themselves in one scrambled heap upon him. Being of athletic build, Billy Potter sustained that shock splendidly.

Billy Potter was one of the oldest friends the Little Shop had had. He was a reporter on a Boston paper, a great favorite with Mr. Westabrook, whom he had many times interviewed; and a devoted friend of Maida's whom he called Petronilla. It was the first time the children had seen him since Maida left for Europe.

He was rather short—Billy Potter—blue-eyed and golden-haired; the eyes very blue

and very observant; his hair closely woven into a thick curly thatch.

The children alternately hugged and thumped him.

"Why haven't you been here before, Billy?" Maida said, "I've been at home two weeks now."

"Only because I wasn't in Boston," Billy declared. "I've been away on my vacation. I had to take it early this year. I couldn't have come over here at this moment, but that I'm on a story."

When Billy Potter spoke of a "story," he meant the account which he wrote of events for his paper. "I'm on a kidnapping case," he explained over their heads to Mr. Westabrook. "I may be here in Satuit on and off for a few days. And if invited, I might become a guest of this noble establishment."

"Oh do come, oh do, oh do!" the children entreated.

"All right," Billy agreed, "I'm only waiting for an invitation, Petronilla."

"Well here it is," said Maida.

"I accept," Billy Potter laughed.

The children had to take him the rounds too. He wondered at and exclaimed over the vege-

table garden. He exclaimed over and wondered at the flower garden. He went in swimming in the Magic Mirror, and showed them many new water tricks. He inspected House Rock with the Little Six. He climbed to the Tree Room with the Big Six. He declared that the Tree Room was where he must sleep. And he did sleep there, although it took all the ingenuity that he possessed, plus the assistance of the three boys, to pull a cot up into it.

And while Billy Potter was still a guest, as though, as Maida said, *wonders would never cease,* Dr. Pierce suddenly appeared on the scene.

Dr. Pierce was the Westabrook family physician. He had known Maida all her life and called her Pinkwink. He too had often visited the Little Shop; had been one of its advisors.

The children deserted Billy for a moment and threw themselves pell-mell on the old physician. He stood braced for the shock which made every one of the tight gray curls on his head quiver and brought the twinkliest of twinkles to his happy old eyes.

"Well, *Pinkwink!*" he exclaimed, "is this the little girl who used to have cheeks as white as paper and eyes like a burnt hole in a blan-

ket? And are these those pale, washed-out, colorless, slim-jim-looking city children I used to know?"

He hugged all the girls impartially, shook hands with the boys; then he too made the rounds of the place.

He played all his old games on them; drawing Betsy out to tell her exploits; listening with great enjoyment to Molly and Timmie; and never ceasing to pretend that Dorothy and Mabel were one girl with a magic power of being in two places at once.

"You must come oftener, Dr. Pierce," Maida said when at last they found themselves seated in the living room.

"Oh I'm coming often enough," Dr. Pierce said. "You'll get good and tired of me before I have finished with you. I'm coming at regular intervals to see that you don't drown yourselves or get ivy-poison, or sun-stroke or lockjaw or any of those things that children are so fond of. I shall make regular inspections. In fact I am going to make one this visit. Now that I speak of it, this strikes me as a good time. Line up over there against the wall, all of you, and stick out your tongues."

Life fell into regular habits after a while.

For work—two hours every morning, except on Thursdays, took care of that. On Thursdays, however, it was a matter of several hours. For play—it seemed as though the rest of the long golden days was all play.

After the household tasks came bathing which had become a habit as regular as eating. Bathing was almost the best fun they had—especially for Dicky.

Dicky soon rejected the water wings. He was swimming now—not of course as fast or as well as the others—but swimming with that fresh joy which only the amateur knows. The others were perfecting strokes of various kinds and practising fancy diving of various sorts. Arthur was of course the best and strongest performer among them. Maida would never be more than a fair swimmer nor Harold; but Rosie had soon out-distanced Laura, was beginning to work into Arthur's class. However Laura was still, would probably always be, the most graceful of them all.

The afternoons were spent in walking and playing tennis; the evenings were given up to reading and games.

It looked at first as if their program would never vary. The beautiful weather kept up and the beautiful country seemed full of diver-

sion. Occasionally came a dark day and then the boys devoted themselves to boxing in the barn; their shouts and laughter would reach even to the Little House. On those occasions Mrs. Dore and Granny would gather the girls about them; set the older ones to mending or to teaching Molly and the Clark twins how to sew.

The Big Six kept running into the Burles although the appearance of any of the Little House children on the path leading to the gypsy camp was a signal for Silva and Tyma to disappear instantly into the bushes. The children frequently came across the young gypsies peddling their baskets in the village—at the pleasant Wampum Arms which was the Satuit hotel; or at the quiet farmhouses along the road. In the long walks that they occasionally took in the woods, Maida and her friends were likely to happen upon the outlaw pair. If the Burles saw the girls coming, they quickly looked and walked the other way. The two gypsies were not however much bothered with attentions from the Little House children, for since the experience at the Magic Mirror, the latter never voluntarily glanced in their direction.

Once Rosie came home almost breathless with rage. "What do you think has just

happened, Maida?" she asked indignantly. "I was coming along the path when I saw a little opening in the bushes. It looked so pretty that I thought I'd cut into it. Just then I saw Silva Burle running—oh running like *sixty*—although she had a bottle of milk under her arm. She heard me coming and suddenly she disappeared through the bushes. But before she got away she made—oh the horridest face at me. I was so mad—"

"She certainly is a strange girl," Maida remarked in a perplexed tone. "I don't understand why she acts so. We've never done anything to her. Why should she treat us like this?"

Arthur also reported that once, early in the morning, he caught sight of Silva Burle flying along the path ahead of him, a bundle of—he could not tell what—under her arms. At the sound of his footsteps—Arthur said it was exactly as though she were afraid of something he might do—though, he added, what she expected him to do, he couldn't guess, she flew to cover like a rabbit; actually vanished from his sight.

But the most disagreeable of all was Laura's experience. Rosie pointed out to her the little opening among the trees which had so

interested her. The next day, passing it alone, it occurred to Laura that she would find out where it led. Like Rosie she walked through the underbrush—but she got farther than Rosie did. Suddenly she came against a trailing tree branch; she started to climb over it. One foot had planted itself. She lifted the other and—splash! A pail of water, hung on an over-hanging branch, fell on her, drenching her from head to foot. It spoiled the gloss of her freshly-ironed muslin frock of course, but it spoiled her temper more. Maida pondered all this evidence, utterly perplexed. Why the Burles should have taken such a dislike to them all she could not guess. She did not speak of it to her father because she was afraid he might complain to Aunt Save. And Maida did not want to make trouble for her friend. But under promise of secrecy, she discussed the situation with Billy Potter. For once, that astute young gentleman had no explanation of a curious social phenomenon.

Billy Potter was coming to see them regularly now; so was Mr. Westabrook. They both had long talks with the children, collectively and separately.

One afternoon as they were sitting in the

living room a curious revelation occurred. Arthur was talking about the forest. It was plain to be seen that it fascinated him beyond measure. Often he would wake early in the morning; slip down to the Magic Mirror; canoe himself across its dawn-swept, glossy surface to the other side; wander for an hour or more in the woods.

"I guess I'll have to make a forester out of you," Mr. Westabrook said that afternoon. "I hope you don't stay up late at night." His remark was not a question, only a comment.

Arthur flushed, remained silent. Mr. Westabrook continued to look at him. And now his look was a question.

"Twice—" Arthur faltered finally—"when the moon was full. I wanted to see if I could come up to some of your deer."

"Well, did you manage?" Mr. Westabrook asked.

"Only once," Arthur answered. "If they get the smell of you—good night! But I read in a book here in the library how to work around so's the wind wouldn't carry it—and one night, I watched a group feeding and tossing their horns nearly five minutes."

"It's a pretty sight," Mr. Westabrook remarked. "I guess if I were a boy I couldn't

resist that myself. But I want you to promise me that you'll make these explorations only the three nights that the moon is full."

Arthur promised readily.

"Oh father," Maida begged, "couldn't I do it too?"

Her father shook his head. "No I guess you little girls must stay in your beds. Yes you too Dicky," as Dicky's lips opened automatically, "and you Harold. Sometime perhaps but not now. Arthur is older and bigger. He can take care of himself. Now," he concluded quickly as if determined to give envy no time to develop, "come out into the barn. I hear there's some good boxing going on here. Besides I want you to show me how your tennis is improving."

The Little Six continued to play near or in the house directly under Granny Flynn's or Mrs. Dore's watchful eye. Occasionally they were permitted to wade in the lake, but only when one of the grown-ups acompanied them. For the most of their time, they were contented to frequent Home Rock.

Maida had told the Little Six that there were toys awaiting them in the Little House. These included dolls of all sizes; doll furni-

ture; little sets of dishes, china and pewter. Granny eked these out with the store of saucerless cups and cupless saucers, the cracked bowls and plates which linger on the outskirts of all respectable china closets. The children were permitted to carry pails of water over to House Rock and there, in its shade, miniature housekeeping began.

From every level, glassy-eyed dolls, sitting placidly in little chairs, or lying placidly in little beds, surveyed the landscape. Every morning the small mothers burst into an orgy of house-cleaning, sweeping rock rooms, dusting doll furniture, washing doll dishes. Every afternoon, there broke out a fury of baking. Hundreds of delicious mud pies were mixed, baked and then abandoned to that limbo, to which all mud pies are sooner or later consigned. When this play gave out, the ingenious Mrs. Dore set them to cutting out paper dolls; and to making, in scrap-books hastily improvised from brown paper, innumerable rooms, furnished with advertisement furniture, cut from magazines. This involved endless hours of cutting in which scissors disappeared as though by witchcraft and reappeared as though by magic; endless hours of pasting from which the small interior deco-

rators returned splashed with flour paste from head to foot.

When in turn this game lost its savor, the resourceful Mrs. Dore designed paper houses, these architectural wonders, made from the endless piles of rejected paper boxes which the under-the-eaves closets of the Little House contained. The Little Six were as much delighted with the Little House and its neighborhood as the Big Six. But unlike the Big Six —with the exception of Betsy—they were content with near-by joys. But Betsy had never recovered from her tendency to run away.

Once or twice she slipped off the House Rock and started to make through the green forests in any direction that occurred to her. But she was always caught. Caught—because after her first straying, Mrs. Dore put on the efficient little Molly the burden of keeping a watch upon her. And Molly watched Betsy —watched her with the same quiet, supervising care which she had always brought to her guardianship of the self-willed, stubborn Timmie. After a while, astute Betsy came to realize that a guard was always near and, for the time being ceased to stray.

"She'll do it sometime," Dicky prophesied

again and again. "She always has and she always will."

The children recovered from their first attack of sunburn; but they succumbed to another and another. The second attack was not so painful and the third was scarcely noticed. The red in their faces deepened to a brown which was like the protection of armor against the sun. The blue-eyed and fair-haired ones—Maida and the two Lathrops—freckled; but Rosie turned a deeper rose-bronze every day; Dicky was fast changing to the color of a coffee bean and Arthur threatened to become pitch-black. As for the Little Six Maida said they were "just colonies of freckles"; and colonies in which layer had grown on layer.

"I can't believe you are the same children I saw in the city a little over two weeks ago," Buffalo Westabrook remarked on his second visit. "First I was afraid you were working too hard. When Maida sent me the program of your work, it looked to me as if you were undertaking altogether too much, but you certainly thrive on it."

"Well we play more than we work," Rosie explained.

"I never was so hungry in all my life,"

Laura declared, "and I fall asleep the moment my head touches the pillow."

"All right," Buffalo Westabrook laughed. "You're doing so well I'll leave it all in your hands."

He always surveyed both the flower garden and the vegetable garden when he came—surveyed them with much interest. He always went into the barn and made an examination of the boys' quarters.

And so with work and play, July wore itself away.

CHAPTER XII

BETSY'S FIND

THE Big Six—as the older children were now called—were returning from their swim. A shower, early in the morning, had delayed the bathing hour until afternoon. And their pent-up spirits had exploded in prolonged skylarking in the water. It was late afternoon when they came in sight of the Little House. They threw themselves under one of the twin elms on the front lawn, a little warm from their walk home. And as the Big Six languidly talked, the Little Six came, in single file, along the trail which led from House Rock.

"Where's Betsy?" the sharp-eyed Rosie called.

"I sent her back for her dolly," Molly explained gravely. "She forgot and left Hildegarde on House Rock. Hildegarde was all dressed up in her best clothes and I didn't fink she ought to stay out all night long."

"That's right, Molly," Maida applauded

the little girl. "Take just as good care of your dollies as you do of yourselves. And then when you grow up, they'll still be with you—like Lucy."

Molly, heading the file turned suddenly and walked soberly over to Maida's side. She knelt down on the grass beside her. "Maida," she said, "when we first came down here, you said if we were very *very* good, we could play with Lucy some rainy day."

Maida laughed up into the earnest little face. The key-note of Molly's coloring was brown just as Delia's was red, Betsy's black, and the Clark twins pink-and-white. Molly's serious little face, from which hung two tight thick little braids, had, even in her wee childhood, a touch of motherliness; and indeed she brooded like a warm little mother bird over the entire rest of the group.

"So I did," Maida said.

"But we've only had free rainy days," Molly complained.

The Big Six laughed. Molly could not pronounce *t* and her failure in this respect always entertained the Big Six. They all reached out and knocked the elm trunk. "Knock wood!" they called to Molly; and Molly, not at all understanding what it was all about, obe-

diently tapped the tree with her dimpled knuckles.

"And you didn't let us have Lucy those free days," Molly stated reproachfully.

"But if you wait long enough, Molly," Maida excused herself, "you are sure to have a big three-days' storm. And I promise you you shall have Lucy all three days."

"And the little hair frunk?" Molly questioned eagerly.

"Yes," Maida agreed, "the little hair frunk."

"Cross you froat!" Molly demanded.

"Yes, cross my froat," Maida agreed and crossed it.

"Oh goody!" Molly skipped away on the wings of ecstasy.

"Did Betsy come back?" Dicky asked carelessly.

"I didn't notice," Maida answered absently, "I wasn't looking."

But after a while the supper bell rang. The children filed into the dining room and took their places. One chair was vacant.

"Where's Betsy?" Mrs. Dore immediately asked.

Everybody looked puzzled and nobody answered.

"I told her to go and get her dolly," Molly asserted.

Nobody paid any attention to her.

"She's probably up-stairs in the nursery," Mrs. Dore decided. "Once or twice she's fallen asleep up there—she's got so tired playing."

She left the room and the children heard her running over the stairs. In a moment or two, they heard her footsteps coming back—at a swifter pace.

"She isn't there," Mrs. Dore said in a quiet voice. "Nor in any one of the up-stairs rooms. Now before you eat, children, scatter about the place and see if you can find her."

"She's run away," Dicky asserted. "I told you she would."

"I told her to go back for her dolly," Molly reiterated gravely.

As Mrs. Dore had ordered, the children scattered. They searched the house, the Annex, the barn, the Tree House, the two gardens, and the adjacent trails. No Betsy! By this time, Floribel and Zeke, looking very serious, had joined in the search. Granny Flynn, obviously frightened, was wringing her hands.

Mrs. Dore's face had turned serious too, but she was quite mistress of herself.

"We'll wait a few minutes," she ordered slowly, "and then if we haven't found her, we'll telephone the Big House. In the meantime, Granny, you see that the children have their supper. The rest of you," she addressed the Big Six, "must go without your supper for a while. I want you to help."

The Big Six wanted to help of course. For a moment or two they wandered about aimlessly—a haphazard group; with Mrs. Dore and Floribel and Zeke trying to direct all at once. Suddenly Arthur Duncan took command of the situation. He ran into the house and emerged with his arms full of things; the cow-bell with which Floribel called the children to meals and four electric flash-lights. "Laura," he commanded, handing her the cow-bell, "I want you to stand here at the door and ring this bell at regular intervals. I'm going to divide the rest of you into pairs and send you off in different directions. We're losing time, all bunched together like this. Now Mrs. Dore, if you and Dicky will go to the Magic Mirror and hunt the woods there—and Floribel, you and Rosie take the House Rock

direction. Zeke, you and Harold search in front, across the road. Maida and I'll beat the woods back of the house. Remember, don't any one of you go out of hearing of the bell. And if any of you find Betsy, come back and ring the bell hard—without stopping."

The four pairs scattered, north, south, east and west. For a few moments Maida could hear the others crashing through the woods. She caught their voices . . . getting farther and farther away . . . calling "Betsy!" . . . "Betsy!" . . . fragments of sentences. Finally as she and Arthur plunged deeper and deeper into the forest, she got only broken blurred calls. At length these too died away. The silence of the immeasurable, immemorial forest closed about her and Arthur. The oncoming dusk seemed to be pouring like a great, gradual-growing flood upon them.

"There isn't any chance of our losing Betsy forever, Arthur?" Maida asked once in a hushed voice.

"Not a chance," Arthur answered. "If we don't find her, your father will. In five minutes he can get enough men together to beat these woods. And by midnight they can cover every spot of them."

"They are awfully big woods, Arthur," Maida commented a little fearfully.

"But a gang of men working systematically," Arthur explained, "could get through them in no time. Why the year my father and I camped out in Maine, there was a child lost in a forest a hundred times as big as this, but the whole village turned out and they found her in an hour." Arthur did not add that the child was only three. He went on. "You see, little children can't walk very fast. They are likely to go round in circles any way. And they soon get tired out. We shall probably find her asleep."

"But if she's fast asleep," Maida remarked, "she can't help us by answering our calls."

To this Arthur answered, "Perhaps our calls will wake her."

In the meantime, they searched every bit of ground thoroughly. At the foot of tree trunks, beside rocks under bushes, Arthur thrust the rays of his electric flash-light. At intervals, he called to Maida and at intervals Maida called to him. It grew darker and darker.

"There, there's the moon!" Arthur said in a relieved tone. "It's going to help a good

deal—having a full moon." Following his pointing finger, Maida caught a faint, red glow through the trees. They searched a little longer.

"Arthur, I can barely hear the bell," Maida exclaimed suddenly.

Arthur sighed. "I was just thinking of that," he said. "I guess we'll have to go back to the Little House and telephone the Big House."

They turned and walked in the direction of the cow-bell. They were too preoccupied with the sense of their unhappiness to talk. Once only Maida said, "She's one of the darlingest little girls I ever knew. If anything happened to Betsy—And then how could we tell her mother?"

When they came out on the lawn of the Little House, they found Floribel and Rosie sitting there. A minute later, Zeke and Harold appeared from one direction and, after an interval, Mrs. Dore and Dicky from another. They all had the same anxious, slightly-terrified look.

"I'll call up the Big House now," Mrs. Dore said quietly. "We can't handle this alone any longer." She started towards the

door and automatically the others followed her in a silent, down-cast file.

And then suddenly, Rosie screamed, "There's Betsy now!"

The whole group turned; stood petrified.

Maida followed Rosie's scream with "And what is she carrying in her arms?"

And then the whole group broke and ran in the direction of House Rock.

Betsy was coming down the trail toward the Little House. The moon was fairly high now and it shown full on the erect little figure and the excited sparkling little face. Her dress was soiled and torn. Her hair ribbon had gone and her curls hung helter-skelter about her rosy cheeks. Her great eyes shone like baby moons as her gaze fell on the group running towards her. A trusting smile parted her red lips; showed all her little white mice teeth.

"She's carrying a fawn!" Arthur exclaimed as he neared her. "Why, it can't be a day old!"

Betsy *was* carrying a fawn. As they surrounded her, she handed it trustfully over into Arthur's extended hands. "I finded it myself," she announced proudly. "I ranned and

I ranned and I ranned. And it runned and it runned and it runned. But I ranned faster than it runned and pretty soon it was all tired out and I catched it."

This was all of her adventure that they ever got out of Betsy. Conjecture later filled in these meager outlines; that Betsy had been coming home with her doll, Hildegarde, when this stray from the Westabrook preserves crossed her path. Dropping Hildegarde —they found her a few moments later, not far from House Rock—she chased the poor little creature over trails, through bushes, across rocks until she ran him down. Then picking him up in her arms, she found the path by some lucky accident and came home.

"Mother of God!" Mrs. Dore said, hugging Betsy again and again, "the child looked like the young St. John coming down the path."

Floribel lifted Betsy in her arms and carried her the rest of the way, a very excited little girl proudly telling her story again and again.

"I ranned and I ranned and I ranned," she kept repeating, "and he runned and he runned and he runned—"

The other children tried to help in the process by holding onto dangling legs and

arms, by patting the little thickly-curly head and by reaching up to kiss the round rosy cheeks. All except Arthur, who carried the exhausted little fawn.

Once home, Betsy was the center of attention for only a moment. She was given her supper; a warm soothing bath and put immediately to bed. Then the fawn took the center of the stage.

The capable Arthur found a big basket which he filled with soft cloths; placed the exhausted little creature in it. He *was* exhausted; for when Arthur first put him on the floor, his legs gave out under him. He spraddled, all four legs flat, on the rug in front of the fireplace—as Rosie said, "exactly like a wet mosquito." Then Arthur heated some milk; dipped a corner of a handkerchief into it; gave it to the fawn to suck. It was a slow process; for the fawn did not seem to understand this strange method of being fed. At length, Arthur thought of a better scheme. Procuring an eye-dropper from the medicine-chest, he poured the warm fluid, drop by drop, into the little creature's mouth.

All the time the children knelt around the basket in a circle.

"How sweet it is," Rosie who adored animals, kept saying. "Look at its big eyes and its beautiful head!"

"I'd love to take it in my arms," Maida exclaimed, again and again, "only I know I would frighten it to death. See how it trembles if we get too near!"

The little children, who had been allowed one glimpse of the deer, went up-stairs chattering like little magpies. Betsy, tired with her long hunting, had fallen asleep the instant she struck the pillow. But the rest were in such a high state of excitement that it was almost an hour before the last of them calmed down. It was not easy that night to drive the Big Six to bed.

When the denizens of the Little House waked the next morning, their tiny forest guest was lying in his basket, bright-eyed as usual. For an hour after his breakfast and theirs, they hovered about him making all kinds of plans in regard to his future. But these dreams were rudely shattered when Mrs. Dore informed them that she had told Mr. Westabrook, over the telephone, the whole episode and that he was sending a man that day to bring the deer back to the Big House.

"Oh I don't see why we have to give him

up!" Maida declared in heart-broken accents. "What fun it would be to have a deer all our own and watch him grow. Just think when his horns came!"

"Oh, Maida!" Rosie begged, "do call your father up and tease him to let us keep him. Just think of having a baby fawn running about the house."

Both the Sixes, Little and Big, added their entreaties to Rosie's.

"I don't think it would be any use, Maida," Mrs. Dore quietly interrupted. "Your father said if by chance any stranger brought a dog here, he would kill the little fawn the moment he caught him. And then when the fawn himself grew bigger, and developed horns, he might even be dangerous. Besides Betsy," as Betsy burst into loud wails of, "I finded him myself. I ranned and I ranned and I ranned—" "Mr. Westabrook said he would send you something nice to take the fawn's place."

"But the fawn's alive," Rosie expostulated in a grieved tone. "And nothing can be as nice as a live creature."

"He said this would be alive too," Mrs. Dore comforted her.

"Oh *what?*" Rosie asked.

Mrs. Dore's eyes danced. "It's a surprise. I'm not to tell it."

Only half appeased, the children hung around the house, waiting to see what the *live* thing was. In the middle of the morning, a run-about drew up in front of the Little House and one of Mr. Westabrook's men alighted from it. He was wearing a long loose coat, but he had nothing in his arms. He took the little fawn, basket and all, and placed it in the run-about. The children tagged his every movement, followed with their eyes his every motion. After the fawn was safely installed on the seat beside him, he turned on the engine.

Betsy burst into tears.

"Oh that's the little girl," the man exclaimed, as though suddenly remembering something, "who found the fawn, isn't it?"

Through her sobs Betsy began, "I ranned and I ranned and I—"

"Well then," the man said, "I guess I've got something for you." He reached into one of the pockets of his big coat and brought out a tiny, nondescript bundle of loose white fur; of helpless waving black paws; big bulging winking black eyes; a curly queue of tail; an impertinent sniffing nose—a baby bull dog.

He handed it to Betsy. Betsy's tears dried in a flash. She hugged the puppy close to her warm neck; ran with him to the house. The children raced after her, and the run-about, utterly forgotten, disappeared down the road.

"Let's call it Fawn," Rosie said, and Fawn it was.

Fawn adopted the Little House as her home at once. She was a very affectionate person and she soon grew to love devotedly every member of the household. They all loved her devotedly in return; but none loved her more than Betsy; and Betsy's dog she always remained.

CHAPTER XIII

DISCOVERY

DO you know I think it would be fine if we went off some day this week on a picnic," Laura said unexpectedly one morning. "I just love to go on picnics. And we haven't had one yet."

"Oh Laura!" Maida agreed ecstatically, "What a wonderful idea! I love picnics too! I adore picnic food and I never yet have had all the hard-boiled eggs I want. How did you come to think of it?"

"I thought of it last night just before I fell asleep." Laura's voice sparkled with pride. "It was all I could do to keep from going in your rooms and waking you and Rosie up to tell you about it. I was so excited that I couldn't fall asleep and so I made a perfectly beautiful plan. I thought we might put up lunches; then get into our bathing suits; paddle across the Magic Mirror to the other side and spend the day there—we have never really explored the other side. I'm sure it's perfect-

ly lovely there and we'll have a wonderful time."

"Let's do it to-morrow," Rosie took up with Laura's plan immediately. "We can get up early; cook the eggs and make the sandwiches. There'll be enough cake left over. And don't let's—oh listen, everybody! Remember not to forget the salt. People always forget the salt on picnics."

"It's ice cream day to-morrow," Harold said sadly. "We'll miss it if we are not home to freeze it."

"No, if you boys will get up early and make it, we can take it along in the freezer with us," Rosie suggested daringly.

"Sure!" Arthur was highly enthusiastic. "I don't care how early I have to get up to make ice cream. I'd rather do that than go without it."

All other conversation was banished for the day. They kept thinking of things they would like to take with them—and stopped only short of the bicycles.

"I should think," Maida said once, "that we were going to Africa for six months at least. Remember one thing though—*don't forget the salt!*"

They were so afraid that they wouldn't

wake in time that they wound their alarm clocks to the very last notch. They did wake in time however. In fact they had to put the alarm clocks under the bed clothes and pile pillows on top of them to keep from waking the rest of the household. With much whispering and many half-suppressed giggles the girls managed to get into bathing suits; went down stairs and began their work in the kitchen. Although the exact number of eggs and sandwiches had been decided on the day before, they held many low-toned colloquies on the subject.

"Remember," Laura said, "you can always eat twice as much at a picnic as anywhere else. I don't know why it is," she concluded thoughtfully, "but even things you don't like taste good. *Be sure not to forget the salt!*"

By the time Floribel appeared to get their breakfasts, they were nearly famished but nevertheless they ate hurriedly, so great was their longing to get off. Arthur shouldered the ice cream freezer. Between them, the girls carried the luncheon. The little children had to be led to the side of the house, so as not to witness their elaborate burden-laden departure. As it was acute little Betsy apparently guessed that something was going on

which did not include her. As the Big Six disappeared down the trail they could hear Granny Flynn soothing her whimperings.

It was a beautiful day. The sun was not yet high enough in the heavens for it to be hot. Indeed dew still lay over everything. But there was a languor in the atmosphere which warned them that it would be hot enough later. The pond was indeed a Magic Mirror. It was like glass. Not a ripple roughed its surface and everything on the shore was so perfectly reflected that it looked painted on the water. The children wasted no time on the view. They pulled the four canoes out of the boat house and began loading them. Arthur paddled alone in one with the ice cream freezer and the lunch. Harold paddled alone in the second with the rugs and the hammock; the others went, two to a canoe. The little fleet kept close.

"Isn't it a beautiful place?" Rosie asked joyously, trailing her hand in the water, "It's like fairy land to-day. How I wish I could see some fairies or goblins or something strange!"

"I'd be content to see some white peacocks," Dicky said soberly.

"Oh Dicky!" Maida exclaimed, "I've never

taken you to see the white peacocks as I promised. I'll do that just as soon as I can."

"I'd rather see some deer." Harold remarked.

"Well all I ask," Laura was very emphatic, "is not to see two people—Silva and Tyma Burle."

"I don't think we'll run into them," Maida declared thoughtfully, "It's a long time since any of us have seen them—over two weeks I should say. Perhaps they've gone away."

"No," Arthur called from his canoe, "I saw them in the village yesterday."

The landing was effected with no difficulty, although here of course there was no pier. They followed the trail through the woods for a long way, trying to find a place to camp. One spot attracted some; a second attracted others; but for a long time, no place attracted them all.

"There are too many stones here," Rosie would say, "it won't be comfortable to sit down."

"And it's too sunny here," Maida commented. "It'll melt the ice cream and the butter—and everything."

"That place slants," Laura made the third objection, "we want a nice flat spot."

"I think I hear water," Dicky cried suddenly.

"Water!" Maida repeated, "Water! How can you hear it? There's no water here. I never saw any brook around here. I can't hear any water."

Neither could anybody else; yet Dicky persisted that he heard the sound of running water.

"You wait here," he exclaimed suddenly, "let me see if I can find it." He disappeared through the trees. He came running back in a few minutes obviously excited. "I haven't found it yet," he explained, "but I certainly hear it plainer and plainer the farther I go."

The others swarmed into the bushes. Dicky led the way like a little human divining rod.

"I hear water," Rosie announced electrically. "Hark!"

They all stopped and listened. One by one they got the soft tinkle. Encouraged they kept on, rounding bushes and leaping rocks. The noise grew louder and louder. A rough trail suddenly appeared. They raced over it as fast as their burdens would permit. The sound was now a lovely musical splash. They came out on an open space, surrounded by pines and thickly carpeted with pine needles.

At one side a great rock thrust out of the earth. Close beside it ran a tiny brook and just beyond the lee of the rock, the brook fell into a waterfall not more than a foot high. The children went wild with delight.

"Do you mean to tell me, Maida Westabrook, that you never knew this was here?" Rosie demanded.

"I never did," Maida declared solemnly. "I have never seen it. I have never heard anybody mention it. Isn't it a darling? What shall we call it? We must give it a name."

Nobody had any names ready and everybody was too excited to think. In fact, at once they began wading up and down the little brook. They explored the neighborhood. Not far off they came upon a curious patch of country. A cleared circle, surrounded by pine trees and carpeted with pines, was filled with irregular lines of great rocks that lost themselves in the bushes on either side.

"I believe this is a moraine," Maida exclaimed suddenly. "I've seen moraines in Europe."

"What's a moraine?" the others asked.

Maida explained how once the earth had been covered with great icecaps called glaciers

and how in melting these glaciers had often left—streaking the earth's surface—great files and lines of rock. "We'll ask father to come here some day," she ended. "He'll know all about it. Billy Potter too—he knows everything."

After a while, they came back to the waterfall. They swept aside the pine needles; spread the tablecloth on the ground; took food from the baskets; set it about in an inviting pile. The ice cream had not melted an atom in the freezer. The sandwiches, done up in wet napkins, were quite fresh. The eggs looked as inviting as hard-boiled eggs are bound to look. Everything was all right except that—and this produced first consternation, then laughter—there was no salt.

"We all reminded everybody else to remember the salt," Maida said in disgust, "and so nobody put it in the basket."

Everybody but Rosie was busy. And Rosie, as though bewitched, was wandering about, gazing up this vista and down that one; examining clumps of bushes.

"Come, Rosie, lunch is most ready," Maida called to her. And as Rosie didn't answer, "*What* are you doing?"

"I'm looking for—" Rosie's voice was muf-

fled. "I thought I saw something—Oh come and see what I've found!" Now her voice was sharp and high with excitement.

The children rushed pell-mell in the direction of the voice. Rosie had gone farther than they thought. Indeed she had disappeared entirely. She had to keep calling to guide them. When they came to her at last, she was standing with her back against a tree, the look on her face very mystified, holding in her arms—

"A doll!" Maida exclaimed. "Who *could* have dropped it? Nobody ever comes here but us."

It was a cheap little doll of the rag-baby order perfectly new, perfectly clean and dry.

"How did you come to find it?" Laura enquired.

"Well it's the strangest thing," Rosie answered in a queer quiet voice. "I was just poking around here, not thinking of anything particularly. . . . And then I thought I saw something moving—a white figure. I started towards it and then. . . . And then it seemed to me that something was thrown through the air. Now when I try to remember, I can't be sure I really did see anything thrown through the air and yet I sort of *feel* that I did. Any-

way I ran to see what it was. When I got there, this doll was lying in the path."

"How curious!" Maida commented. "You must have imagined the figure, Rosie. See, there's nobody here "

A little awed, the children stared through the trees, this way and that. But they stood stock still.

"Yes, I must have imagined it," Rosie admitted. "Still when I try to make myself believe I didn't see anything, something inside tells me I did."

"Let's look about," Arthur suggested. They scattered exploring; diving into bush clumps, and peering behind rocks. Fifteen minutes went by.

"Well we've found nothing." Arthur ended the search as he had begun it. "Let's go back and eat lunch."

"Oh let's!" begged Harold. "I never was so hungry in all my life."

"Nor I!" "Nor I!" came from the others. Maida alone remained thoughtful. She led the file, however, back to the waterfall. And it was she who suddenly stopped and called, "Look! Look what's happened—" She stopped as though her breath had given out.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TERROR

IN the midst of the clearing, the paper tablecloth still lay on the ground, a great shining rectangle of white. Scattered about, crumpled, soiled, or torn were the paper napkins. Everything else, even the ice cream from the freezer, had disappeared.

"Why, who took it?" Arthur demanded in a dazed voice. "Who *could* have taken it?" he went on in a puzzled one. "Is any one of you playing a joke?" he asked suddenly of the others.

Everybody protested his innocence.

"We haven't been gone more than fifteen minutes," Arthur went on. "Let's look about. It doesn't seem to me anybody could have carried all that stuff far and we not get a glimpse of it. It might be tramps."

"One thing is certain," Maida protested, "tramps didn't do it. There are never any tramps in Satuit."

The children started their search. They

looked behind trees and under bushes; but they showed a tendency to keep together. They talked the matter over, but instinctively their voices lowered. They kept glancing over their shoulders. They found nothing.

"It's like Magic," Maida commented in a still voice. "You were saying, Rosie, that you wished you could see some fairies or goblins. It looks to me as though the goblins had stolen our lunch."

Arthur alone did not leave the clearing. He stood in the center pivoting about, watching every vista and gnawing his under lip. His face was more perplexed that any of them had ever seen it.

"Well if we don't find our lunch pretty soon," he said after a while, "we've got to go back home to get something to eat."

"Perhaps somebody's playing a joke on us," Rosie suggested, "and if we wait for a while, they'll bring the lunch back."

There seemed nothing else to do. So, rather sobered by this mysterious event, the children seated themselves in a group by the brook.

"I can't wait very much longer," Laura admitted dolefully. "I'm nearly starved. I was so excited about the picnic that I hardly ate any breakfast."

"Just a few minutes more," Arthur begged. "Maida, please tell us a story."

"Once upon a time," Maida began obligingly, "six boys and girls were cast away on a great forest with nothing to eat. It was a forest filled with gob—Hark!" she interrupted herself, "What's that?"

From somewhere—not the forest about them, nor the sky above: it seemed actually to issue from the earth under them—came a strange moaning cry. The children jumped to their feet. The boys started apart. The girls clung together. The cry grew louder and louder. It was joined by a second voice even more strange; and then a third entered the chorus.

It was too much.

The little group, white-faced and trembling, broke and made for the trail. The girls started first. The boys staid still, irresolute; but as the uncanny sound grew louder and louder, soared higher and higher, they became panic-stricken too. They ran. Arthur, ending the file, walked at first. But finally even his walk grew into a run. The others leaped forward. They bounded over the trail, gaining in terror as they went. In some way, they got into the canoes but half a dozen times their

trembling and fumbling nearly spilled them out. It was not until they were well out into the middle of the Magic Mirror that their composure came back.

"What do you suppose it was?" Maida asked, white faced.

"It couldn't have been a ghost could it?" dropped from Laura's shaking lips.

"No." Arthur dismissed this theory with complete contempt.

"I should think it was a crazy person," Harold declared. "Is there a lunatic asylum around here, Maida?"

"No," Maida replied.

"Is there any crazy person about here?"

Maida shook her head.

"I think it was a tramp who first stole our lunch," Arthur guessed shrewdly, "and then decided to frighten us away."

"I think the wood is haunted." Rosie shivered.

"Nonsense!" Maida exclaimed.

"Well I wish I hadn't run away," Arthur burst out impatiently. "I wish I'd stayed."

"So do I, Arthur," Maida agreed vigorously. "That's the first time I ever ran away from anything in my life."

"Let's go back," Arthur suggested.

Laura burst into tears. "Oh, please don't." she begged. "I'm frightened to death."

"We won't go, Laura dear," Maida reassured her, "don't worry." She continued after an interval of thought, "And don't let's tell Granny Flynn and Mrs. Dore about that screaming. Let's say that our lunch was stolen while we were away. If I tell them all of it, they won't let us go on another picnic."

"Well, believe me, I don't want to go on another picnic," Laura said, her eyes streaming still.

However, by the time they had reached the jetty and had tethered the canoes, they were more composed. When they reached the Little House even Laura had begun to smile, to admit that the tramp theory was probably the correct one.

Granny Flynn and Mrs. Dore looked very much concerned when they heard the story. They asked many questions. Finally they decided with Arthur that tramps were the answer to the strange happening. Maida persisted though that tramps were never permitted in Satuit.

The next morning Arthur strolled down to the lake alone. In a little while, he came run-

ning back white with rage. "What do you suppose has happened?" he called while still running up the trail. "We didn't lock the canoes in the boathouse last night and somebody has made a great hole in all four of them."

The Big Six rushed down to the Magic Mirror. It was only too true. Four of their canoes were ruined. The children stood staring at them, horrified.

"I don't think tramps would do this," Arthur said slowly. "They'd steal them, but there'd be no sense in destroying them."

"No," Maida said slowly. "This looks as though we had an enemy who is determined to make us as unhappy as possible."

CHAPTER XV

ARTHUR'S ADVENTURE

IT was after eleven, a cloudless night and a beautiful one. A great white moon filled the sky with white light and covered the earth with a thin film of silver. The barn door opened slowly and noiselessly. Arthur emerged. Padding the grass as quickly as possible, he moved in the direction of the trail; turned into it. For a while he proceeded swiftly. But once out of hearing of the Little House he moved more slowly and without any efforts to deaden his footsteps. That his excursion had a purpose was apparent from the way that, without pause or stay of any kind, he made steadily forward. It was obvious that the Magic Mirror was his objective.

He dipped into the Bosky Dingle and there, perhaps because the air was so densely laden with flower perfumes, he stopped. Only for an instant however. After sniffing the air like some wild creature he went on. Presently he came out on the shore of the lake. Taking a key from his pocket, he opened the little

boathouse in which, since the accident, the canoes were nightly locked; pulled one of them out; shoved it into the water. He seated himself in it and started to paddle across the pond.

Curiously enough, however, he did not strike straight across the Magic Mirror. He kept close to the edge as though afraid of observation; slipped whenever he could under overhanging boughs; took advantage of every bit of low-drooping bush. So stealthy and so silent was his progress indeed that from the middle of the lake he might not have been observed at all. This was however a slow method. It was nearly midnight when he reached the point about opposite the boathouse, which was apparently his objective. He stopped short of it, however; tied the canoe to a tree trunk, just where a half-broken bough concealed it completely; stepped lightly ashore. Apparently he had landed here before. There developed, under the moonlight, a little side trail which led in the direction of the main trail. He took it.

Now his movements were attended by much greater caution. He went slowly and he put his feet down with the utmost care even in the cleared portions of the trail. Wherever underbrush intervened, he took great care to skirt

it or, with a long quiet leap or a prolonged straddle, to surmount it so that no sound came from the process. It was surprising, in a boy so lumbering and with feet and hands so large, with what delicacy he picked his way. Indeed, he moved with extraordinary speed and a surprising quiet.

A little distance up the trail, he turned again. This time, he took a path so little worn that nothing but a full moon would have revealed its existence. Arthur struck into it with the air of one who has been there before; followed it with a perfect confidence. At times, it ceased to be a path at all; merged with underbrush and low trees. But he must, on an earlier excursion, have blazed a pioneer way through those obstacles because each time he made without hesitation for the only spot which offered egress; emerged on the other side with the same quiet and dispatch. He went on and on, proceeding with a greatly increased swiftness but with no diminution of his caution.

After a while, he came into ordered country. Obviously he had struck the cleared land that, for so many acres, surrounded the Big House. Now he moved like a shadow but at a smart clip. He had the confident air of one

familiar with the lay of the land. After a while, he struck a wide avenue of trees—Mr. Westabrook had taught him its French name, an *allee*. This was one of five, all beginning at the Big House and ending with a fountain or a statue. Arthur proceeded under the shade of the trees until he came out near the Big House. Then he swung himself up among the branches of a tree; found a comfortable crotch; seated himself, his back against the trunk. With a forked stick he parted the branches; watched.

The moon was riding high now and, as the night was still cloudless, it was pouring white fire over the earth. The great lawn in front of the Big House looked like silvered velvet. Half way down its length, like a jet of shredded crystal, the fountain still played into its white marble basin. Out of reach of its splashing flood, as though moored against its marble sides, four swans, great feathery heaps of snow, slept with their heads under their wings. As Arthur stared a faint perturbation stirred the air, as though somewhere at the side of the house—unseen by him—a motor pulsed to rest. Presently a high, slim dog—Arthur recognized it to be a Russian boar-hound; white, pointed nose, long tail—came sauntering across

the lawn. He poked his nose into the basin of the fountain. One of the swans made a strange, low sleepy cry; moved aimlessly about for an instant, then came to rest and to sleep, apart from his companions. The hound moved into the shrubbery; returned to the lawn.

As though the swan's call or the dog's nosing had evoked it, one of the white peacocks emerged from the woods, spreading his tail with a superb gesture of pride and triumph. The long white hound considered the exhibition gravely. The peacock, consciously proud, sauntered over the velvet surface of the lawn for a while alone. Then a companion joined him and another. Finally, there were three great snowy sails floating with a majestic movement across the grass. The display ended as soon as it began. One of the trio suddenly returned to the treey shade; the other two immediately followed. The lawn was deserted by all except the fountain, which kept up untiringly its exquisite plaint. The boarhound sped noiselessly towards the house.

Arthur waited for a moment; then he slipped down from the tree; made back over the way in which he had come. But he did not pursue the same trail. He made a detour

which would take him further around the lake. And if he seemed cautious before, now he was caution itself. He moved so slowly and carefully that no human could have known of his coming, save that he had eyes, or ears or a nose superhumanly acute. And Arthur had his reward.

Suddenly he came to an opening, which gave, past a little covert, on a glade. And at the end of the glade, a group of deer were feeding in the moonlight. Arthur did not move after his discovery of them; indeed he seemed scarcely to breathe. There were nearly a dozen. The bucks and does were pulling delicately at the brush-foliage; the fawns browsed on the grass. In spite of Arthur's caution, instinct told them that something was wrong. The largest buck got it first. He stopped feeding, lifted his head, sniffed the air supiciously. Then one of the does caught the contagion. She too lifted her head and for what, though really a brief moment, seemed a long time, tested the atmosphere with her dilated nostrils. Then the others, one after another, showed signs of restlessness. Only the little fawns continued to stand, feeding placidly at their mothers' sides. But apparently the consensus of testimony was too strongly in favor of retreat.

For an instant, the adults moved anxiously. Then suddenly as though the word of alarm had been whispered into every velvety ear—dash! Flash! There came a series of white gleams as all their short tails went up. And then the glade was as empty as though there were no deer within a hundred miles.

Arthur went on. And now, as though he hoped for still another reward of his patience, he moved with even greater care. But for a long time, nothing happened. In the meantime clouds came up. Occasionally they covered the moon. Then, the light being gone, the great harbors and the wide straits between the clouds seemed to fill with stars. The moon would start to emerge; her light would silver everything. The smaller stars would retreat leaving only a few big ones to flare on.

Such an obscuration had come. And while the moon struggled as though actually trying to pull herself free, a second cloud interposed itself between her and the earth. The world turned dark—almost black.

The effect on Arthur was however to make him pick his way with an even greater care. The trail here was not a blind one. It was the one that ran presently into the path that led from the gypsy camp to the Moraine. Ahead,

Arthur could just make out the point where the trails crossed.

Suddenly the moon came out with a great vivid flare. It was as though an enormous searchlight had been turned on the earth. Something—it seemed the mere ghost of a sound—arrested Arthur's footsteps. He stopped; stood stock still; listened; watched.

Something or somebody was coming up the trail from the direction of the gypsy camp. In a moment he would pass the opening. It was human apparently, for the sound was of human footsteps. They came nearer and nearer. A straight, light figure with hair that gleamed, as though burnished, passed into the moonlight. . . . It was Silva Burle.

CHAPTER XVI

MYSTERY

ARTHUR'S first inclination was to call. But something within him warned him not to do that. Something just as imperative advised him to another course of action. He waited a moment or two to let Silva get far enough ahead, so that she could not possibly hear his footsteps. Then he followed her.

She walked with an extraordinary swiftness —so swiftly indeed that Arthur was put to it to keep up with her. However she had the advantage over him in that she knew the trail perfectly. Her feet stumbled over no obstacles; her arms hit no protruding branches; her face brushed against no scratchy twigs. She moved indeed as though it were day. Arthur was in a difficult situation. He must walk quickly to keep up with her; but if he walked too quickly she would certainly hear him.

Presently she came to the place in the trail where it turned at right angles on itself. Arthur, anticipating this, stopped in the shadow

of a tree in the far side of the path. Silva turned swiftly. It happened that she did glance indifferently backwards over the way in which she had come. But she could not have seen Arthur; for she went on at the same composed high pace. But Arthur saw that she was carrying under her arm a bottle of milk.

Arthur quickened his cautious footsteps; came in his turn to the fork in the trail. There was Silva ahead, her white skirt fluttering on both sides of her vigorous walking, much as the white foam of the sea flutters away from the prow of the ship. She kept straight on and Arthur kept straight on. The moon dipped behind clouds and dove out of them; flashed her great blaze on the earth and shadowed it again. On and on they went, the stalker and the stalked. They were approaching the Moraine. Big stones began to lift out of the underbrush on either side. Some were like great tables, flat and smooth; comfortable and comforting. Others were perturbing—like huge monsters that had thrust themselves out of the earth, were resting on their front paws or their haunches even. Layers of rust-colored leaves—the leaves that had been for many years falling—lay between them. And now and then the moonlight caught on the

rocks with a black glisten and on the leaves with a red gleam; for the dew was falling.

Arthur began to wonder what he should do. He somehow took it for granted that Silva was going to the Moraine; mainly because there seemed no other place for her to go; though for what purpose he could not guess. If for any reason she stopped there, he must soon become visible to her. Indeed there were only two courses for him to take: retreat by the path over which he had come or through the wood on either side. He could not make up his mind to turn back. If he took the second course, he would undoubtedly get lost. He would have to wait for daylight to find his way home and that, he recognized at once. would be stretching inexcusably the generous liberty which Mr. Westabrook had given him. He might call to Silva. But again something inside seemed to warn him not to make his presence known. He continued to follow the vigorous figure ahead.

As though she were approaching the end of her journey, Silva was hurrying faster and faster. Arthur hurried too. Silva broke into what was a half run. It would have been, Arthur felt, a complete run, if she were not carry-

ing the bottle of milk so carefully. Arthur seethed with perplexity. Why was she speeding so? What could she possibly have to do at this spot and at this hour? What could require such urgent haste? Well, perhaps he would know in another moment.

And then suddenly strange things happened all at once.

Silva's rapid progress had, as it apparently neared its object, become less careful. At any rate, an overhanging briar caught her hair; pulled her up sharply. In her first effort to extricate herself, Silva turned completely about; caught sight of Arthur's figure a little way down the trail.

She started so convulsively that even Arthur could see it. Then with a swift wrench of her slender hand she tore her hair away; turned and ran like a deer in the direction of the Moraine.

Arthur ran too. And as he ran he called, "Don't be afraid, Silva. It's Arthur Duncan from the Little House. Don't mind me! I won't hurt you."

But Silva only redoubled her speed. Arthur redoubled his. He was gaining swiftly on her. He entered the Moraine. On the

other side Silva was just disappearing from it. "I tell you," he called, "I'm not going to hurt you. Stop! I want to speak to you!"

Silva did not answer. He heard a frenzied floundering among the underbrush. For the noise Silva made, she might have been an elephant. And then suddenly came silence—silence utter and complete.

Had she fainted? What could be the matter? What a silly girl to act like that! Arthur rushed across the Moraine; penetrated the woods on the other side.

Silva had disappeared as completely as though she had vanished into the air. Arthur stared about him like one waking from a dream. Then he began to search for her. Around rocks, into clumps of bushes he peered. Nobody. Nothing.

"Silva Burle!" he called. "Silva! Silva! Where are you?" And then because he was genuinely alarmed, "Please answer. Please! I'm afraid you're hurt." Another search over a wider area. He mounted rocks this time. Remembering how Silva could climb, he stared upwards into trees. He crawled on hands and knees through every little thicket he found. And all the time he kept calling. Still nobody. Still nothing. As far as he

could see, he was absolutely alone in that part of the wood.

After half an hour, he gave it up. But he was a little alarmed and very much humiliated. He walked back over the trail to the Magic Mirror and all the time his head was bent in the deepest thought. He found the canoe; absently slid into it; mechanically paddled himself across the water. And all the time he continued to think hard. "It's like a dream," he thought. "I'd think anybody else was dreaming who told me this."

When he reached the barn, the whole mysterious episode seemed to float out of his mind in the great wave of drowsiness which suddenly beat through him. He fell immediately into slumber. But his sleep was full of dreams, all so strange that when he awoke in the morning, his experience of the night before threatened for a moment to take its place among them. "But I didn't dream the peacocks or the deer," he said to himself. "And I know I didn't dream Silva!"

He said nothing of his experience to any of the other children, though he found himself strangely tempted to tell Maida. But a kind of shyness held him back. At times it occurred to him that Silva might be lying in-

jured somewhere in the woods. But always some instinct made him believe that this was not true.

Halfway through the morning Granny Flynn sent him on an errand to the village. As he came out of the Post Office, he ran into Silva Burle just about to enter it. He tumbled off the wheel which he had just mounted.

"Say," he said without any other greeting, "where did you disappear to last night?"

"Last night!" Silva repeated in a bland tone of mere curiousness. "What do you mean by *last night?*"

"You know very well what I mean," Arthur persisted. "Last night in the Moraine—in the woods."

"In the Moraine—in the woods," Silva repeated. "I don't know what you're talking about. I didn't sleep in the woods last night. I slept in my tent as usual."

Arthur looked at her hard. "Well," he said after a moment, "either you're telling the biggest whopper I ever listened to or you were walking in your sleep."

"Walking in my sleep," Silva said scornfully, "you're crazy." And she passed on.

CHAPTER XVII

CRESCENT MOON BEACH

IT was drawing near the middle of August. And now with each sunrise, the fun at the Little House seemed to double itself.

"I never saw such a place as this," Rosie wailed once. "There aren't hours enough to do all the things you want to do every day; and not days enough to do all you want to do every week."

There was some justice in Rosie's complaint. The day's program of swimming, tennis, croquet, bicycling, reading and games had been broken into by the coming of the berry season. Blueberries and blackberries were thick in the vicinity and the children enjoyed enormously eating the fruit they had gathered.

Floribel taught the little girls how to make blueberry cake and blackberry grunt and on their teacher's day out, the Little House was sure to have one of these delicacies for luncheon and another for dinner. The Big Six tried to do everything of course; and as Laura complained, they succeeded in doing every-

thing badly and no one thing very well. One day Maida appeared at the table with a radiant look of one who has spawned an idea.

"Granny," she said, "we haven't had a picnic on the beach yet. Every summer we go to the beach once at least. Can't we go this week on Floribel's day out? We girls will cook the luncheon and pack it all up nicely."

"But the beach is pretty far away," Mrs. Dore said warily. "How far is it? Could you walk to it?"

"It's between four and five miles," Maida answered hazily. "You see the little children could go in the motor and the rest of us—the Big Six—could go on our bicycles."

"But I don't think," Mrs. Dore said, "that I'd like you children to go so far away without a grown person with you."

"Yes, of course," Maida said, "you and Granny come too."

"But with Zeke and Floribel away," Mrs. Dore protested, "who would drive the automobile?"

Maida's face fell. "Oh," she exclaimed, "I never thought of that."

All the faces about the table—they had grown bright in anticipation of this new excursion—grew dark.

Zeke had already taught Arthur and Harold to run the machine, but Mr. Westabrook's orders against unlicensed persons driving it, were strict. For a moment it looked as though the ocean-picnic must be given up.

"I think," Maida faltered, "if I ask my father to lend us Botkins and the big car, he'd do it."

Mrs. Dore shook her head. "I wouldn't like to have you do that, Maida," she said. "Your father has given us everything that he thinks necessary for this household." She added gratefully, "And more than any of us had ever had in our lives before. I should certainly not like you to ask a single thing more of him."

Again gloom descended on the Big Six. And then hope showed her bright face again.

"Ah'll tell you what Ah'll do," Floribel, who was waiting on table, broke in. "Zeke and Ah've wanted fo' a long time to see the big ocean. Now eff yo'll let the lil' children go on dat pic-a-nic, Mis' Dore, Zeke and Ah'll go with them and tak' the best of care of them."

"Oh *would* you, Floribel?" Rosie asked.

"Well, in that case," Mrs. Dore decided

thoughtfully, "I don't see why you shouldn't all go."

Madness at once broke out in both Sixes, Little and Big. Laura, Maida and Rosie leaped to their feet and danced about the room. The little children beat on the table with their spoons and the three boys indulged in ear-splitting whistles.

The next Thursday, Floribel, Zeke, the Little Six and the lunch, packed somehow into the machine, the Big Six on their bicycles, streaming ahead like couriers, started off for the beach.

"Thank goodness we've remembered the salt this time," Rosie said to Arthur as they mounted their wheels, "I took care of that myself."

It was a beautiful day, cool as it was sunny, brisk as it was warm. The winding road led through South Satuit and then over a long stretch of scrub-pine country, straight to the beach.

Just as they emerged from the Westabrook estate into South Satuit, Maida's bicycle made a sudden swerve. "Why I just saw Silva Burle!" she called in a whisper to Rosie. "She was walking along the trail towards the

Little House. I wonder what she is doing there?"

"Well you may be very sure she isn't calling on *us,*" Rosie declared, "and if she is I'm delighted to think that Granny will say, 'Not at home!' "

"Still," Maida said thoughtfully, "that trail leads directly to the Little House. She must be going there for some reason."

"Probably," Laura remarked scornfully, "she's hoping she'll meet some of us, so's she can make faces at us."

The automobile arrived at the beach first and the cyclists came straggling in one after another. Crescent Moon Beach was like a deeply cut silver crescent, furred at each tip of the crescent with a tight grove of scrub pines which grew down to the very water's edge. Beyond it, except for a single island, stretched unbroken the vast heaving blue of the Atlantic. Under the lee of the southern tip of the crescent was a line of half-a-dozen bath houses.

"What a wonderful, wonderful beach!" Laura commented.

"And there's that island," Dicky said, "that we see from the Tree House—Spectacles

Island, didn't you say—oh no, I remember, Tom Tiddler's Ground. How I wish I could swim out to it. I have never been on an island in my life. Could you swim as far as that, Arthur?"

Arthur laughed. "I should say not. Nobody but a professional could do that—and perhaps he'd find it some pull. It's much longer than it looks, Dicky. Distances on the water are very deceiving."

"What's on the Island, Maida?" Dicky went on curiously. "Have you ever been there?"

"Oh yes," Maida answered, "once. I went on father's yacht but I was such a little little girl that I have only one impression—of great trees and enormous rocks and thick underbrush."

Dicky sighed. "I wish we could go on a picnic there!"

"What's that over there?" Harold demanded, pointing to a spot far out where a series of poles, connected by webs of fish-net, rose above the water's surface.

"Oh that's a fish weir," Maida declared electrically. "I'd forgotten all about that. You see the tide's going out. It goes out almost two miles here. And if we follow it up,

we can get into the weir and come back before the tide overtakes us."

Maida explained the situation to Floribel. Floribel turned to Zeke for advice. Zeke corroborated Maida's story. He had, he said, been in that weir several times himself. Floribel said she would stay on the beach with the Little Six while Zeke accompanied the Big Six. When they came back, she added, lunch would be all spread out on the beach.

"The last bath house," Maida informed them, "is ours. Now let's get into our bathing suits at once because we have no time to lose."

It was only partially low tide when they arrived but it almost seemed to the children that they could see the water slipping away towards the horizon. When they emerged from the bath house, a patch of eelgrass, not far off, made a brilliant green spot in the midst of the golden sand. As the Big Six started towards the fish weir, the Little Six were splashing about in the warm shallows near shore.

"Oh what fun this is!" Rosie said. "I love salt-water bathing more than fresh water—I don't know why. But somehow I always feel so much gayer."

The salt water seemed to have an effect

of gayety on all of them. They chattered incessantly when they were not laughing or singing. At times they came to hollows between the sand bars where the water was waist-high, but in the main, the water came no farther than their knees; and it continued to recede steadily before them. Sand-bar after sand-bar bared itself to the light of the sun—stretched before them in ridges of solid gold. Eelgrass—patch after patch—lifted above the water; spread around them areas of brilliant green. Above, white clouds and blue ether wove a radiant sky-ceiling. And between, the gulls swooped and soared, circled and dashed, emitting their strange, creaking cries. It seemed an hour at least to the Big Six before they reached the weir, but in fact it had taken little more than half that time.

Zeke found the entrance to the weir and they followed him in. Here the water was waist-deep. Zeke explained the plan of the weir. It was, he pointed out, nothing but a deep-sea trap for fish. The fish entered through the narrow opening into a channel which led into the big inner maze. Although it was very easy for them to float in, it was a very difficult matter finding the way out. Caught there, as the tide retreated, they stayed until the fisher-

man arrived with his cart and shoveled them ignominiously into it.

"Oh, oh!" Laura shrieked suddenly. "This place is full of fish. One just passed me! Oh, there's another! And another!"

But by this time both the other girls were jumping and screaming with their excitement; for fish were darting about them everywhere. The boys, not at all nervous of course and very much excited, were trying to drive the fish into corners to find out what they were. Zeke identified them all easily enough—cod, sculpins, flounders, and perch.

"What's that big thing?" Arthur exclaimed suddenly. "Jiminy *crickets!*" he called excitedly. "It's the biggest turtle I ever laid my eyes on."

The girls shrieked and stayed exactly where they were, clinging together. But the males all ran in Arthur's direction.

"Dat's some turtle, believe muh," commented Zeke.

"I'm going to take it home," Arthur declared, "and put it in the Magic Mirror."

"The Magic Mirror!" Laura echoed. "Why I would never dare go in swimming if I knew that huge thing was there."

"We'll keep it tied up with a rope," Ar-

thur went on excitedly. "It can't get where we go in swimming because the rope won't be long enough. Come on, fellows, help me get it."

"How are you going to catch it?" Harold demanded.

"Lasso it!" Arthur declared, untying a stout rope which hung from one end of the weir posts.

The prospect of catching such big game was too tempting for the males of the party. And so while the girls dashed madly about, trying to get out of their reach, screaming with excitement and holding on to each other for protection, but really enjoying the situation very much—the boys chased the turtle from corner to corner, until finally Arthur managed to lasso a leathery paw and tie it captive to a weir post. How he did this, he himself found it hard to say, because the water was lashed to a miniature fury by the flounderings of both the turtle and its captors. It was probably pure accident, he was humble enough to assert. But having caught the creature, they were not content until they had brought him ashore. and so the procession started beachwards, Arthur pulling the turtle at the end of the rope.

It was a huge turtle at least two feet in di-

ameter. It had wide leathery flappers, a wicked looking head—as big, Rosie said, as her alarm clock. But its shell was beautifully marked.

As they approached the beach they could see the great square of the tablecloth laid out on the sand and Floribel busy piling up sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs; fruit and cake. The Little Six came running to meet them and then it became a problem to keep them out of the way of the turtle's snapping jaws. They had no difficulty however, with Floribel, who screamed with terror at the sight of the strange creature and would not allow them to bring it onto the beach. They ended by mooring it, by means of a large rock, in one of the pools near the shore.

Then, forgetting their prey for a while, they sat down to lunch. They were ready to do full justice to it.

"Lord*ee!*" Floribel exclaimed once. "Dey'se salt enough here for an army—shuah! Who put all dat salt in the basket?"

The three girls burst into giggles.

"I was so sure we'd forget the salt," Maida said, "that I put in a pair of salt-cellars."

"I put in three," declared Rosie.

"And I put in four," confessed Laura.

After lunch, following the orders which Mrs. Dore had given them, they sat on the beach for an hour before they went in bathing again. This prolonged itself to much more than an hour because they began making the inevitable collections of shells and stones to take home. Floribel said that moon-stones were sometimes found on this beach and there instantly began a frantic search for the small, translucent white stones. Of course everybody found several of what he supposed were invaluable gems. By this time the tide, which had turned just as they left the fish weir, was now galloping up on the beach in great waves. They had to pull the turtle farther and farther in shore. At length they all went in bathing again; the Big Six diving through the waves and occasionally getting "boiled"—which was the local term for being whirled about—for their pains. Floribel permitted the Little Six to play only in the rush of the waves after they broke.

After five o'clock, blissfully tired, excitedly happy, they piled the little children into the machine; packed the turtle in the big lunch hamper, tied the cover securely over him and started home.

Wild with excitement and the news of their

find, they dashed into the Little House.

"Oh Granny you'll never guess what we've brought home with us," Maida exclaimed.

"And oh what a wonderful day we've had," Rosie added.

"And how tired we are and how hungry," Laura concluded.

The little children were all chattering with excitement; the boys were attending to the turtle in the barn, preparatory to taking it to the Magic Mirror.

"I'm glad you've had a good time, children," Granny said gravely. "Your father is here, Maida, and he wants to see you all in the living room."

Something seemed to have gone out of the gayety of the day. What it was or what made it go or where it went, Maida could not guess. Perhaps it was a quality in Granny's air and words. At any rate she said instantly, "I'm going right in there, Granny, and Rosie will you please tell the boys to come at once?"

Rosie too had caught an infection of this seriousness. She sped to the barn. In three minutes, the Big Six had gathered in the living room. Mr. Westabrook was sitting on the couch in front of the fire.

"Good afternoon, children," he said quietly.

"I told Granny to ask you to come here the instant you came home, because I had something to say to you. It occurred to me to-day that I would come over to the Little House when you didn't expect me and make an inspection. Hitherto I have come regularly every Sunday. This is Thursday. I'm glad I did because I found that neither the flower garden nor the vegetable garden had been weeded for the last three days. The barn was in a very disorderly confusion. I asked Granny how the girls had left their rooms and although she didn't want to tell me, she had to say that the beds were not made and apparently nothing had been done. But the worst thing of all that I have to say is that I find that the tennis court is all kicked up as though it had been played on after a shower without having first been rolled."

There was an instant of silence in the room; a silence so great that everybody could hear quite plainly the ticking of the grandfather's clock. Arthur spoke first.

"Mr. Westabrook," he said in a low voice, "we ought to be ashamed of ourselves and I certainly am. After all your kindness to us—I won't try to make any excuses because there are no excuses we can make."

"It's all my fault," Harold admitted, "I'm

supposed to run the boys' end of the work and I have not held them up to keeping everything right."

"It isn't your fault," Dicky declared hotly, "no more than mine or Arthur's. We're all to blame."

"I'm awfully ashamed of myself, Mr. Westabrook," Rosie confessed almost in a whisper. "I wouldn't blame you if you *never* forgave us, but I hope you will."

"I don't know how we got this way," Laura said in perplexity. "We began right."

"We've been having such a good time," Maida explained in a grave tone, "that we've just let ourselves get careless."

"Then," Mr. Westabrook advised them, rising, "try not to let yourselves get careless again." He shook hands all around; and kissed his daughter. "Fair warning," he said, "I don't know when I'm coming again, but it won't be when you expect me."

It was a very subdued and a very tired little trio of girls who went up-stairs and attended to their rooms. It was an even more subdued —though a less tired—trio of boys who put the barn in order and then trailing the turtle at the end of his rope, walked down to the Magic Mirror, and tied him to a tree, and deposited him in the water there for the night.

CHAPTER XVIII

EXPIATION

A VERY quiet group of children gathered at breakfast the next morning. Conversation was intermittent and devoted mainly to piling offers of assistance in the housework on Granny and Mrs. Dore.

"When you have finished your own work, we'll see," Mrs. Dore steadily answered all these suggestions.

The children finished their work in record time and with the utmost care. The girls swept and dusted their chambers. They washed the furniture, the paint and the windows. Everything was taken out of closets and bureau-drawers, shaken and carefully put back. They shook rugs. The boys in a frenzy of emulation followed a program equally detailed. Having accomplished all this, the Big Six again begged for more work and Granny and Mrs. Dore, taking pity on the penitent little sinners, thought up all kinds of odd jobs for them to perform.

At length, Maida said, "Now we've done all

the work we can do, there's one other thing I'd like to see attended to. I woke up in the middle of the night—I don't know what woke me—but I began at once to think of that turtle—that poor, horrid turtle. And it suddenly came into my head that it was a very cruel thing to put a creature in fresh water who is accustomed to salt water. I suppose it'll kill him in time, won't it?" she appealed to Arthur.

"Gee *whillikins,*" Arthur answered, "I never thought of that! Of course he'll die. But what are we going to do about it?"

"I thought," Maida began very falteringly, "if you would let us, Granny, we'd ask Zeke to drive us over to the beach and we'd take the turtle and put him back in the water where he came from. We won't stay there but a moment."

"I don't see why you shouldn't do that," Mrs. Dore accorded them thoughtfully.

"And as for me, I'll be glad to be well rid of the craythur," Granny said shudderingly.

So it was settled. After luncheon, the three boys went down to the Magic Mirror, hauled the poor awkward beast out of the water; pulled it along the trail to the barn. They loaded it into the lunch hamper again; stowed

it in the automobile; and then Zeke drove them to the beach.

Once there, they lifted the hamper out of the machine, removed the cover and dumped its living contents onto the sand.

There was no question as to the turtle's wishes in this matter. Without an instant's hesitation, he turned in the direction of the ocean; and lumbered toward it over the sand—lumbered awkwardly but with a surprising swiftness. The waves were piling in, like great ridges of melted glass, green edged with shining, opalescent filigree. They shattered themselves on the sand and seemed miraculously to turn into great fans of green emerald trimmed with pearl-colored, foam lace.

The turtle struck the broken wave . . . swam into it . . . dove through the next wave . . . and the next . . . and the next. . . . Suddenly they lost sight of him.

When they returned, still unnaturally quiet, to the Little House, to their great surprise Billy Potter came forward to meet them.

Their subdued spirits took an involuntary jump. Nevertheless they greeted their guest in an unusually quiet way. Billy's perceptions, always keen, apparently leaped

in an instant of calculation to the truth. After a while, in which he devoted himself to the Little Six, he suggested that the Big Six take a walk with him. They accepted the invitation with alacrity and plunged into the woods.

When they were out of sight of the Little House, "Now what's the matter?" Billy Potter suddenly demanded.

They told him; all at once; each interrupting the other, piling on excuses and explanations; interrupted with confessions and self-accusals.

"We feel that we've treated Mr. Westabrook rottenly," Arthur concluded.

"And we don't know what to do to show him we're sorry," Rosie after a pause added.

"That's pretty bad," Billy commented. "Now let's think of some way out of this." He himself meditated for an interval, falling into a study so deep that no one of the children dared interrupt it.

"I'll tell you," he burst out after a while, "Why not invite Mr. Westabrook down for an afternoon—to make another inspection of the house—and to stay for supper. You probably haven't shown him for a long time how well you can cook."

"No, we haven't," Maida said. "I think father has eaten only one meal that we girls cooked."

"I think that would be lovely," Rosie agreed.

"Let's do it as quickly as possible," Arthur suggested. "This is Friday morning. Why don't you invite him for Monday night?"

The children caught the suggestion at once. That night, working together—for Billy Potter stayed over only one train—they painfully drafted a formal invitation to Mr. Westabrook to spend Monday afternoon with them and stay to supper. They posted it the next morning and almost by return mail, they received a formal acceptance.

Monday was a day of the most frantic work that the Little House had ever seen. Everything was swept that could be swept; dusted that could be dusted; washed that could be washed; polished that could be polished. Rosie even washed off the stepping stones that led to the Little House. And Maida not to be outdone, shined the brass knocker on the door and the knob. Laura was only stopped in time from pinning flypaper, which she had bought with her own pocket money, on the outside of the screen door.

"There are no flies in the house," Mrs. Dore protested, "and we can't catch all the flies in the outside world."

The boys cleaned the barn, the little cellar to the house, its tiny garret. They rolled and re-rolled the tennis court. They begged for other work and Mrs. Dore gave them all the table silver to polish and some pots, obstinately black, to scrape.

When Mr. Westabrook came, the place looked, as he said, as though they had cleaned the outside with manicure tools and the inside with the aid of a microscope. The supper which, in deference to Mr. Westabrook, included a single hot dish, consisted of one of Rosie's delicious chowders; one of Maida's delicious blueberry cakes; one of Laura's delicious salads; and a freezer full of the boys' delicious ice-cream.

Mr. Westabrook said that he had eaten meals all over the United States and in nearly every country in Europe and he could not recall any one that he had enjoyed more than this.

That night the Big Six went to bed with clear consciences.

CHAPTER XIX

MAIDA'S MOOD

"WHAT are you so quiet about, Maida?" Dicky asked at breakfast a few mornings later. "I don't think you've said a word since you've got up."

"Haven't I?" Maida replied. But she added nothing.

At first because of the noise which prevailed at breakfasts in the Little House, nobody noticed Maida's continued silence. Then finally Rosie Brine made comment on it. "Sleepy-head! Sleepy-head!" she teased. "Wake up and talk. You're not in bed asleep. You're sitting at the table."

Maida opened her lips to speak but closed them quickly on something which it was apparent, she even repented thinking. She shut her lips firmly and maintained her silence.

"S'eepy-head! S'eepy-head!" the little mimic, Delia, prattled. "Wate up and tot. Not in bed as'eep. Sitting at table."

Everybody laughed. Everybody always laughed at Delia's strenuous efforts to produce

as copious a stream of conversation as the grown-ups. But Maida only bit her lips.

The talk drifted among the older children to plans for the day.

"Perhaps you will give us your views, Miss Westabrook," Laura said after some discussion, with a touch of purely friendly sarcasm. "That is if you will condescend to talk with us."

"Oh can't I be quiet once in a while," Maida exclaimed pettishly, "without everybody speaking of it!" She rose from the table. "I'm tired of talking!" She walked quickly out of the dining room and ran upstairs to her own chamber. The children stared for a moment petrified.

"Why I never saw Maida cross before," Rosie said in almost an awed tone. "I wonder what can be the matter. I hope I didn't say anything—"

"No, of course you didn't," Arthur answered. "Maida got out of the wrong side of her bed this morning—that's all."

"Well," Laura concluded generously, "if anybody's got a right to be cross once in a while, it's Maida. She's always so sweet."

After breakfast, the children separated, as was the custom of the Little House, to the

early morning tasks. But Rosie and Laura lingered about, talking in low tones, before one went to the library and the other into the living room to do her daily stint of dusting. After this work was finished, they proceeded to the garden and plucked flowers together.

It was phlox season and Laura cut great bunches of blossoms that ran all the shades from white to a deep magenta through pink, vermilion, lavender and purple-blue. But Rosie chose caligulas—changelessly orange; zinnias—purple, garnet, crimson; marigolds—yellow and gold.

"Oh how lovely they look," Laura exclaimed burying her face in the delicately-perfumed mass of phlox. She put her harvest on a rock and helped Rosie with the more difficult work of gathering nasturtiums. The vines and plants were now full of blossoms. It was impossible to keep ahead of them. They picked all they could.

"I hope Maida isn't sick," Laura said after a while.

"I don't believe she is," Rosie reassured her.

"I wonder if we ought not to go up to her room," Laura mused. "Let's!"

Rosie reflected. "No, I think we'd better

wait until after we've come back from the errands. Maida wants to be alone so seldom that I guess we'd better not interrupt her. Besides I heard her slam her door hard and then lock it. I guess that means she doesn't want anybody around for a time."

"I guess it does too," Laura agreed. "It isn't my turn to go to market, but I'm going with you this morning, Rosie. It'll give Maida a chance to be alone for a while."

The little girls trundled their bicycles out of the barn; mounted them and speeded down the long trail which led to the road.

In the meantime, Maida still remained in her room. She made her bed with fierce determined motions, as though it were a work of destruction rather than construction. She dusted her bureau with swift slapping strokes. Then she sat down by the window. Why was she cross, she didn't know; but undoubtedly she *was* cross. She didn't want to go anywhere; she didn't want to play games; to see anybody; least of all to talk. Why—when ordinarily she was so sociable, she should have this feeling she had no idea. Nevertheless it was there.

From various directions, sound of voices

came to her; Rosie's and Laura's from the garden; the boys from the barn; the little children from House Rock. Rosie and Laura were nearer, but she could not hear what they were saying. And of course she made no attempt to listen. Later she heard them go around to the barn—she knew they were off on the morning marketing. Still Maida continued to sit listlessly looking out of the window.

A long time seemed to go by.

Presently she heard in the distance, the sound of Laura and Rosie returning. They were evidently in a great state of excitement. She could hear them chattering about something as they came up the trail to the house. She did not feel like talking, but she knew it was her duty to meet them, to apologize for her rudeness, to go on with the usual games of the day. She caught the rattle with which the two girls put their bicycles in place; then their swift rush to the kitchen. At the door she got in Rosie's high excited tones, "Where's Maida, Granny?"

"Still upstairs," Granny answered. "I haven't heard her stir."

"We've got something to tell her," Rosie went on swiftly.

"And the most dreadful thing has hap-

pened," Laura put in simultaneously. Then talking together in phrases that broke one against the other or overlapped, "A dreadful accident . . . Silva Burle . . . this morning . . . she was on her bicycle . . . man just learning to run an automobile . . . knocked her off . . . picked up senseless . . . It happened in front of Fosdick house . . . took her in . . . there now. . . ."

"How is the poor choild?" Maida heard Granny ask compassionately.

"Nothing broken," Laura answered eagerly, "but it was a long time before she came to."

"She's not unconscious any longer," Rosie concluded the story. "She's asleep, but she moans and mutters all the time."

Maida listened, horrified. She felt that she ought to go downstairs and talk with the girls. She felt that she ought to get on her bicycle, go at once to see Silva.

Apparently Mrs. Dore said something to that effect; for Rosie answered promptly, "Oh no, nobody's allowed to see her yet."

Somehow if she could not go to Silva, Maida did not feel like talking. Not yet at any rate. Why not get away from the house until her strange mood passed?

CHAPTER XX

MAIDA'S FIND

MAIDA crept slowly out of her room; stole softly down the stairs; ran quietly to a side entrance; opened the screen door gently; closed it inaudibly; dashed down the trail to the Magic Mirror. She arrived at the boathouse panting. But she did not wait to recover her breath. Quickly she unlocked the door and pulled out one of the canoes, leaped into it so swiftly that she almost upset it, paddled as rapidly as she could towards the center of the lake.

It was an unusually hot day. And paddling was hot work. The water looked tempting. Maida battled with a temptation, which she had never known before, to jump overboard just as she was in her fresh clean dress and take a long swim. But she knew that Granny Flynn would disapprove of this and she relinquished her project with a tired sigh. She did not stop paddling until she reached the other side of the lake. Then she drew the

canoe in close to the shore, under an overhanging tree; lay down in it; stared vacantly up at the sky.

"I know what's the matter with me," she thought suddenly. "I'm tired. I didn't sleep well last night. I had a dreadful dream —Now what was that dream? It was a nightmare really and it seemed to last so long. What was it—Oh *what* was it?"

She groped in her memory in the way one does to remember a haunting but elusive dream. It was like trying, in pitch darkness, to pick out one rag from scores of others in a rag bag. Then suddenly a ray of light seemed to pierce that darkness and she put her hand on the right rag.

Very late, long after midnight indeed, it seemed to her that somebody came into her room, that she half-waked; spoke. That somebody did not answer and she fell asleep again. Yes, she remembered now, that that somebody seemed to come in through the window. She fell asleep and yet not entirely asleep . . . . That somebody moved about the room . . . looked at everything. . . . That somebody stopped near the little hair-cloth trunk which contained Lucy's clothes. After a while . . . that somebody went away . . .

through the window. . . . But all night long, a sense of trouble and disturbance kept bringing Maida out of deep sleep to ruffled wakefulness; then sent her back into a heavy and fatiguing slumber.

Thinking this over and staring up at the blue sky, Maida drifted off to sleep. She woke—it must have been nearly two hours later—perfectly refreshed. But she did not go back immediately to the Little House. Instead, the sight of a columbine in the woods made her determine to land. She knew that Rosie particularly loved the columbines and pursuing, half absently, the trail which went to the Moraine, she soon gathered a great armful.

Maida became so absorbed in this pleasant duty of reparation that she went further than she intended. In fact, it was with a real sense of surprise—and a slight tingle of terror—that suddenly she found herself at the approach to the Moraine itself. She had not been there since the extraordinary day of the picnic and although she had not let her mind dwell on the curious experience of that occasion, she had by no means forgotten it. For a moment, she hesitated about going further. And then she caught a glimpse, across the

rust-brown pine-needle-covered expanse, of a great clump of columbines faintly nodding their delicate heads. Involuntarily Maida dashed across the Moraine and picked them. More appeared beyond. She picked all these and then just beyond, she caught sight of a tiny field of columbines. Maida moved in their direction, plumped herself down in the midst of their beautiful living carpet. It was cool there and quiet. The pines held the sun out, although their needles were all filmed with irridescence; but they let little glimpses of the sky through their branches. Some strange wood insect burst into a long strident buzz.

Suddenly there came, as though from the very ground under her feet, a long wailing cry.

Maida turned white. Her heart leaped so high that she felt with another such impulse it would break through her chest. She jumped to her feet, still clutching her flowers, raced across the Moraine into the path. She had not gone very far before something stopped her; not an obstacle but a thought. She had expected, remembering the day of the picnic, that the voice would be joined by two others. This did not happen. That first voice maintained its eerie call. The thought was, "That cry is not the cry of anything frightening

like a goblin or a wild animal, or a tramp—it is the wail of a baby."

Maida stood for a moment just where she had stopped. The cry began again. Terror surged through Maida. But she clinched her hands and made herself listen. Yes, that was what it was—the wail of a baby. Could it be some little baby animal crying for its mother—a fawn like Betsy's or—and here Maida's hair rose on her head again—a baby bear? Her common sense immediately rejected this theory. There were no bears in the woods. And if it were a baby deer, she would be ashamed of being afraid of a baby deer when Betsy showed no fear. For another interval she stood still fighting her cowardice. Then suddenly she took her resolution in hand. "I'm going to find out *what* it is," she said aloud. Perhaps she was assisted in this by the cessation of the mysterious wail. Only for a moment however! Her resolution received another weakening blow by the sudden resumption of the uncanny noise. But she did not actually stop, she only faltered. For the farther she walked across the Moraine, the more it sounded like the crying of—not a baby animal—but a regular baby. Suddenly all Maida's fear vanished forever. "I am not

afraid any more," she said to herself. And she wasn't.

The hard thing was to discover where the cry came from. It seemed under her feet. She plunged here, there, beyond—everywhere, looking up and down but finding nothing. Then she began a more systematic search. Starting with the very edge of the Moraine she took every rock as it came along, searched around and over it; each clump of bushes, parted them and walked through them. Still the cry kept up. Occasionally she stopped to listen. "That baby's sick," she said once, and later, "I do believe it's hungry."

Ahead, a big rock thrust out of the earth like an elephant sitting on its haunches. At one side, two bushes grew at so acute an angle and with branches so thickly leaved, that the great surface of the rock was concealed. Maida parted them.

Underneath there was no rocky surface. The bushes concealed a small low opening to what looked like a cave. Was it a cave? Where did it lead? How far? Would—and again Maida's heart spun with terror—would she confront an enraged mother bear if she entered it? But these questions all died in Maida's mind. For, emerging undisputedly

from the cave, came the fretful cry of a baby.

Without further question, Maida dropped to her hands and knees and crawled into the opening. Crawled *down* rather; for the entrance sloped at first. Then, it began to grow level. The crying grew louder.

It was a big cave. The end was lost in shaddow but in the light from the entrance, Maida could see something lying, not far off, on a heap of bed clothes. As she looked, a tiny hand came up and waved in the air. Maida could not stand upright yet. But she hurried over to that tiny hand. She was beginning to get the glimmer of a little white face.

It *was* a baby.

The baby put up its hands to her. Maida lifted it from the ground and made rapidly backwards to the cave opening. It was a lovely baby—Maida decided that at once—a girl, getting towards a year old, brown-complexioned with a thick shock of dark hair and big brown eyes. For a moment, it looked at Maida in surprise and even in baby distrust; then it began to cry. Its open mouth displayed four little white teeth.

Maida put the baby down on the soft grass in the shade of some bushes. She returned to the cave. She found a candle there; some

matches in an iron box. She lighted the candle. There was one pile of baby clothes, unironed though perfectly clean, but in tatters. Beside them was another pile. Somehow these seemed familiar. Maida looked closely.

They were Lucy's clothes.

Then—lightnings poured through Maida's mind— It was not a dream— Somebody had come into her room . . . robbed her . . . robbed little Lucy. . . . But she must not think of that now, with a crying, perhaps a starving baby on her hands. Further back was a bundle of hay, pressed down as though somebody older slept there. There was a little alcohol lamp and the materials for warming milk; milk bottles but no milk.

Maida returned to the baby, who had resumed its crying; took it into her lap; rocked it.

What should she do? The baby must belong to somebody. But where was that somebody? It was hungry now. She felt sure of that. It seemed to her that she ought to take the baby home. And yet suppose the parent should come back? Then she would be in the position of stealing a baby. What should she do? She could not go off and leave it. Nor could she stay indefinitely. She had not even

told them at the Little House where she was going. They would be worried about her. They would think that, like Betsy, she was lost. Pretty soon they might send out searching parties. How she regretted her pettishness of the morning. And still if it had not been for that, she would not have come here; would not have found the baby. What *should* she do?

She put her hands over her eyes, as though shutting out the sight of things made it easier to think. Perhaps it did. For suddenly it came to her that the first thing to consider was the baby. Babies must not be neglected. Babies must be fed. It was a serious matter for them to go too long without their milk. Suddenly she pulled her little red morocco diary from her pocket; tore out a page. With the little pencil that lay in the loop of the diary she wrote:

I have taken your baby to my home—the Little House. It is at the end of the trail just across the lake. I was afraid you had deserted her and she would get sick and die. I am sorry if you are worried, but you can have your baby at once by claiming her.

A phrase slipped from she knew not where into her mind. She concluded with it: "and

proving property." She signed her own name and under it wrote, "Daughter of Jerome Westabrook, financier."

Her mind made up, Maida worked quickly. Holding the baby in her arms, she walked swiftly down the trail to the canoe. Here a problem presented itself.

She could not hold the baby in her arms, nor could she let the hot sun of that hot August day pour on the little head. After a great deal of difficulty and some maneuvering, she managed to stand up some thickly-leaved branches so that they made a shade. She placed the baby on one of the canoe cushions in its shadow; stepped into the canoe.

Never had Maida paddled so carefully or so well. On the other side, she tethered the canoe; lifted the baby out. She had cried all the way across the lake and was still crying fitfully.

"Somebody may come and break the canoe," Maida surmised swiftly, "but I can't wait to put it away." She hurried in the direction of the Little House. "What a surprise I've got for them," her thoughts ran. She was toiling along slowly now, for by this time, the baby had grown heavy as lead. Maida had to stop many times to rest her

arms. Her back ached as though it would break. "They'll all want to keep this baby forever and I wish we could."

But the surprise was not all for the others, nor indeed much as compared with their surprise for Maida. For as Maida neared the house, Rosie came flying down the path. Maida saw that her face was white and that great tears were pouring down her cheeks.

"Oh, Maida," she sobbed, "where have you been? We've been looking for you everywhere. A most terrible thing has happened. Poor Mrs. Dore"—she burst for an instant into uncontrollable sobbing; then composed herself, "—fell down the cellar stairs and broke her leg. We've had a dreadful time—Where did you get that baby?"

"In a cave," Maida answered faintly. "Will you carry her, Rosie, I'm so tired. Go on quickly. Tell me all about it—"

Rosie took the baby into her expert arms; continued. "Well, Arthur called up the Satuit doctor and he came with an ambulance and they've taken her to the Satuit Center hospital. Granny Flynn had to go with her—and we're all alone. We'll have to run the house ourselves until Granny can get back. Poor

Dicky feels dreadful and now we've got this baby on our hands. Everything happens at once, doesn't it? Gracious, I'll have to give this poor little thing something to eat right off. That's a hungry cry."

CHAPTER XXI

TRAGEDY

INDOORS was the scene and sound of confusion. Delia, sensing the panic that lay in the atmosphere, was crying wildly for her mother. The other children, unchecked, were running about the house in a game that seemed an improvised combination of tag and hide-and-go-seek. Their excited cries rang from above. Arthur was at the telephone trying to get Central. Beside him, a pencil ready to take down anything of importance, very wan-faced and pale, drooped Dicky. From the dining room came the clatter of plates as Harold and Laura went practically to work to set the table.

Arthur stared at Maida and Rosie as they entered with their strange bundle; stopped his telephoning to say, "Where did you get that baby?"

"I'll tell you in a moment," Maida said wearily, "but now we've got to work fast and I never was so tired in my life. Oh Dicky

dear, I'm so sorry for you! Poor, poor, Mrs. Dore and poor, poor Granny!"

But it was Rosie who really took the situation in charge, Rosie who so loved babies, Rosie who having helped so long in the care of her own little brother, knew exactly what to do.

"Tell Laura to get some milk from the ice chest, Arthur!" she commanded crisply, "and warm it up on the stove as quickly as possible. Then bring it upstairs to us. Maida, you come with me!" Rosie marched up to the bathroom and Maida meekly followed. On the first floor, "Get Mrs. Dore's sewing board!" Rosie ordered and Maida got it. In the bathroom, Rosie placed the sewing board across the tub, close to the hand bowl; began to undress the baby.

There were few things to take off. They were all loose, comparatively clean, but ragged. Soon the little creature lay on the soft towels that Rosie had spread on the sewing board, kicking feebly. The removal of her clothes seemed to ease her. Her cry abated its violence a bit. Only what was the translation of a baby sob came now and then. Rosie filled the bowl with warm water, then with the gentlest of soothing strokes and us-

ing the softest sponge she could find, she began to bathe the baby. Its crying died down completely. It responded to this cooling treatment with a little soft coo that drew from Maida, "Oh the little darling. Don't you love her already, Rosie?"

"I love all babies," Rosie said in a business-like tone, sopping the little girl's downy head. She dried her carefully—deft little pattings that seemed merely pettings—with the finest towel she could get.

"Run to Mrs. Dore's room and get Delia's powder!" she commanded briefly again. When Maida returned, she covered the little glowing form with the cool powder. The baby's eyelids began to droop.

"See how sleepy it is," Rosie said with a kind of triumph. "Ah there comes Laura. Oh I wonder if she had the sense to put the milk in one of Delia's old bottles?"

Laura had had the sense to do this, and was obviously proud of her foresight. Very expertly, Rosie turned a few drops from the bottle onto the back of her hand; decided it was not too hot; inserted the nipple in the baby's mouth. The little girl pulled on it like one famished; pulled so hard and long and deep that Rosie had, once or twice, to take the bottle

away to keep her from choking. The little hands always reached out for the bottle and after a few instants Rosie gave it to her again.

In the meantime, Maida answered the stream of Laura's questions, and Laura answered the torrent of Maida's.

The baby pulled continuously at the bottle. Rosie had to lift the lower end higher and higher. After a long while, the baby dropped the nipple with a little sigh of relaxation. Her eyes, which had been growing heavier and heavier closed . . . opened . . . closed. . . .

Now she was asleep.

"I don't know what her feeding hours are," Rosie said. "I'll give her another feeding at four this afternoon. I'm going to fix the alarm clock so that I'll wake at ten to-night, then I'll let her go until morning. I don't believe she has more than one night feeding. Even if she does, she can get along without it, one night. She seems famished now though. I never saw such a hungry baby."

"You wake me up," Maida said almost jealously. "Remember she's *my* baby."

"Yes," Rosie agreed, "I'll wake you." She knit her satiny brows. "I wonder whose baby she is? They must be awfully worried about her by this time."

"Oh, I left a note," Maida protested.

"Are you sure you left it where they'd see it?"

Maida nodded. "I put a stone on it to hold it down and I surrounded it by other pages that I tore out of my diary and put stones on them. You could not fail to see it."

Rosie lifted the baby and carried it to her bed. "I don't think she could fall off," she said. "But to make sure I'll put chairs up against her and bank her around with pillows. Now we'd better let her sleep."

In the meantime, Arthur had finished his telephoning. Mrs. Dore was as well as could be expected; was resting quietly. The break was a simple one. All she needed, in order to recover, was time and rest. The three boys had managed to stop Delia's sobs; had captured the five other children and were keeping them quiet. Now they bombarded Maida with questions.

For the third time, Maida told the story of the baby. "Well, Maida, you certainly were brave," Laura declared, "to follow that noise until you found out what it was. I would have run as fast as I could and as far as I could. That is, if I hadn't fainted."

"No," Maida protested, "I wasn't brave

I wish I had been. At first I was as frightened as I could be. But when it flashed on me that it was a baby crying, it didn't take any courage to find out where the baby was."

"I wonder whose baby it is," Harold said.

Everybody said this at least once, everybody except Arthur, but Arthur said nothing. He was thinking hard.

"Something queer happened to me the other night," he broke out suddenly. "I didn't tell you all about it because—because—Well somehow I couldn't. I didn't know what the answer was and I was ashamed that a girl could beat me like that."

"Like what?" Rosie demanded. "What are you talking about? Oh, Arthur, do tell us!"

Arthur related in all its detail his experience with Silva Burle. "It made me wild," he admitted. "to think that a girl could find a path that I couldn't see and get away from me when I could run twice as fast as she—Well not twice as fast," he corrected himself honestly, "but a great deal faster."

"Well of course Silva's a queer girl," was Rosie's comment. She added, "She won't be running down any paths for some time yet I'm afraid, poor thing!"

"I think Silva had something to do with that baby," Arthur guessed shrewdly.

"What nonsense!" Rosie said briskly. "What would she be doing taking care of somebody's baby in the woods?"

"But she had a bottle of milk under her arm," Arthur persisted.

"Yes," Rosie said in an uncertain voice, "and that reminds me that I have seen her before carrying bottles of milk."

"Oh I think somebody's probably left that baby there for the day," Laura said, "some tramp—or somebody."

"But it must have been the baby crying that frightened us on the day of the picnic," Harold declared.

"Well then," Laura explained, "it was the same baby and the same people, whoever they were, left the baby in the cave that day too."

The telephone rang. Arthur answered it. He listened for a moment, then he said, "Yes, of course. We'll be all right. Tell her not to worry." He turned to the others. "Poor Granny's so upset that she wants to stay near the hospital all night, so she can see Mrs. Dore the first thing to-morrow morning. She asked if we could get along by ourselves until Flori-

bel came to-night and of course I said we could."

"Of course we can," Maida reassured him.

"Oh I'm so glad Granny can stay. It does seem as though everything came at once."

"Things go by three's," Rosie asserted.

"Well what are our three?" Maida inquired. "There was Mrs. Dore's accident, finding the baby and— What's the third?"

"You wait," Rosie prophesied loftily, "It'll come. But now the thing to do is to get lunch. Thank goodness for all those cooking lessons we've had. Don't you remember, Maida that your father said that we'd never know when we'd be put in a situation that we'd be very glad we could cook."

"What shall we have for luncheon?" Maida asked and her voice quavered a little.

"We'd better look into the ice chest and see what's there," suggested the practical Laura.

"Oh here's all this nice stew left over from day before yesterday!" Rosie's head was concealed by the ice chest door but her tone was that of one who has found diamonds. "That's nice because all we've got to do to that is warm it up. I'll attend to the stew."

"And here's some delicious tarts," Laura exclaimed, "that Granny must have made

this morning. We'll have them for dessert."

"Now while I'm warming the stew," Rosie commanded, "you two cut the bread; fill the milk pitchers and put the butter on the table."

When they summoned the others to lunch, they found the seats all changed about. This was the work of the practical Rosie. "You must each of you take care of one of the children," Rosie explained. "Now all of you begin buttering the bread while I am dishing out the stew."

Laura had Betsy, and Dicky, Delia. Harold had one of the Clark twins and Laura the other. Maida took care of both Timmie and Molly; so that Rosie had nothing to do but serve.

"My goodness, I never realized how much work Granny and Mrs. Dore do," Laura said once, "and how patient they are. Delia, that's your fourth slice of bread and butter. Now you *must* drink your milk."

CHAPTER XXII

SILVA'S MESSAGE

AFTER the dishes are washed and wiped, let's set the table for supper," Laura suggested. "Floribel will be so tired when she gets home, and thinks of all the work she'll have to do alone."

So the girls added this to the work they had already done.

"Shall we go in bathing this afternoon?" Rosie asked when the last knife and fork was in place.

"You all go if you want," Maida answered, "I don't think I want to swim. Somehow I feel as though I'd like to stay about the house. So many things have happened that I'm worried about going away."

"So do I, Maida," Laura agreed emphatically.

So although the boys went in swimming as usual, the girls stayed at home.

"I feel tired, too," Maida remarked. They took books from the library and settled quietly in the Tree Room where they read and talked

all the afternoon. They were interrupted twice—once by the boys who, as though they had a responsibility too, cut their swimming short—and by the baby.

When the baby awoke, late in the afternoon, Rosie brought her downstairs into the air for a while. They all declared that she looked quite a different child. A tinge of pink had come into her soft brown cheeks and the warmth and moisture of her nap had curled the brown hair in her neck.

"Oh you sweet *sweet* darling!" Maida kissed the little girl ecstatically. "Oh how I wish your parents would give you to me! That's all we need in the Little House—a baby. Delia's not quite little enough." She caught Delia and kissed her.

"Delia bid dirl," Delia protested.

Even the boys were amused and entertained by their little visitor. Arthur deigned to make faces for her. They amused her enormously, and when Harold unloosed an ear-splitting whistle, she turned round, delighted eyes in his direction. But that she was still tired was evident; she kept falling into little naps.

"I don't think I'll bathe her again so soon," Rosie meditated with knitted brows when they

had taken her upstairs for the night. "To-morrow I'll give her a bath in the morning and another at night. But now I'll just wash her face and hands and let her have her bottle. You do it this time, Maida and to-morrow," added Rosie, generous always, "we'll take turns bathing and feeding her."

As they came downstairs Laura said, "I wonder what time it is. Oh half past five!"

"Five!" Maida exclaimed. "Why Floribel ought to have been home at five! What train can she get now?"

Nobody knew, but Arthur remembered there was a time-table in the library. They clustered about him. To most of them it was as difficult as Greek; but to Arthur, who had had some experience in traveling and to Maida who had had a great deal, it did not seem insolvable.

They puzzled over it together.

"There's a train at six from Boston and another at seven," they finally decided. "And that's all."

"She must have lost the three from Boston," Maida declared. "But the six from Boston isn't due here until eight. And in the meantime we'll have to get supper."

"Say let us boys help," Arthur suggested.

"It must be a big job cooking for twelve. I know how to cook," he added unexpectedly.

"Where did you learn, Arthur?" Maida asked with interest.

"Tramping with my father," Arthur answered briefly. "We often camped in the woods for days."

"Supper isn't so hard as dinner," Rosie said hopefully. "Now I propose that we have a combination salad with hard-boiled eggs cut up in it. You see there's a lot of cold vegetables in the ice chest and we can make a custard and orange pudding."

The whole group, three girls and three boys, bustled into the kitchen. From a drawer full of aprons, Rosie took out enough for all of them. The little girls wore the aprons as they should be worn, but in the boys' case, Rosie tied them around their necks. "I've seen boys cook before," she announced scornfully, "and when they get through, they generally look as though they had fallen into a barrel of something."

The boys protested loudly. But to some extent Rosie's pungent comment seemed to be justified. Arthur for instance squeezed the orange juice into his own eye. He yelled so

loudly at this unexpected deluge that Harold dropped an egg on his coat.

"There I told you!" Rosie declared scathingly. "What did you pick out an egg to drop for, Harold, why didn't you drop a potato?"

However pride goeth before destruction and the contemptuous Rosie was soon caught up with; for clandestinely stealing a long sliver of ice from the high ice box, she seized it in such a way that it slipped out of her hand and dropped down her neck.

"Serves you right," Arthur declared with delight. With heartless interest they all watched her wriggles before she was able to secure and extricate the slippery, rapidly melting sliver.

"You look as though you had had the hose squirted on you," said Dicky.

But their supper was good. The salad—lettuce with cold peas, string beans, tomatoes and sliced eggs—was so pretty that Maida said she thought it ought to be used as an ornament for the center of the table. As for the custard and orange pudding—to which the gifted Laura had added a delicious meringue—they ate and ate.

"I never tasted anything so good in all my life," Rosie sighed. "I wish we'd made a bathtubful. Once I had a dream," she went on pensively, "where it looked as though I was going to have all the sweet things to eat I wanted. I dreamed that when I came out in the morning to go to school, the whole neighborhood was made of pink and white candy—everything, houses, streets, lamp-posts. I took a big bite right out of my fence."

"And what happened then?" Maida asked breathlessly.

"I woke up, goose. Wouldn't you *know* that that was what would happen with a whole worldful of candy to be eaten?"

After talking a while longer, they all filed into the living room; began to look about for their books. Suddenly the telephone bell rang. Maida was nearest. "I hope nothing else has happened," she said as she took off the receiver.

"I want to talk with Maida Westabrook," came a girl's voice over the wire to her. Strange it was and yet it had a familiar ring; the strangeness was its weakness and its breathlessness.

"I am Maida Westabrook."

"Listen! I must talk quick. They will be

back and stop me. I am Silva Burle. They think I am asleep. I have tried to tell them. They won't listen. They think I am raving. I'm not. I've got my senses. My baby sister, Nesta, is in a cave on the other side of the lake. Tyma is away. There's nobody to feed her. She'll starve—"

"I found her this afternoon, Silva," Maida interrupted. "She's upstairs in the Little House now—fast asleep."

"Oh!" Silva's voice dropped almost as though she were faint. Then suspiciously, "Are you saying this to me because you think I'm raving? Oh tell me the truth. I ask God to be my witness that I am telling *you* the truth."

"Yes, Silva," Maida said steadily, "I am telling you the truth. I give you my word of honor. I went across the lake this morning. I heard the baby crying. I followed the sound and found her. Don't worry any more about her. We'll keep her here just as long as you're ill." She started to add the news of Mrs. Dore's accident, of Granny's and Floribel's absence, but a sudden discreet impulse bade her not to go on. Instead she said, "How did you happen to have the baby in that cave?"

"It's a long story," answered Silva weakly. "I can't tell you now. Will you come to see me to-morrow?"

"Yes," Maida agreed, "in the morning."

"You promise?" Silva's weak voice entreated; it almost threatened.

"I cross my throat and my heart!" Unseen by Silva, Maida solemnly performed these rituals of the pledged word.

"And you're sure she's all right?"

"Sure," Maida answered. "You ought to hear her laugh and coo."

"Ask her how often they feed her," came from Rosie's clear voice from behind. Maida repeated the question.

"Four times a day—at nine; at twelve; at three and at six, and then at night."

"That's what Rosie said," Maida explained, "four in the day and one at night."

"I can never thank you enough." Silva's voice had something in it that Maida had never heard there before. "But some day— Here they are coming up the stairs. I must get back to bed." Silva's voice cut off quickly. Maida listened for a while, but there was no sound.

A babble of questions assailed her when she

dropped the receiver. She told them all she knew.

"Who would have thought that baby would have turned out to be Silva Burle's sister!" Rosie remarked thoughtfully.

"Well now," Laura prophesied with a faint lilt of triumph, "I guess she won't be so pig-headed."

"Nesta," Maida said. "What a sweet name! I'll go to-morrow morning at—" And then the telephone rang again. Maida took the message. "It's Floribel," she announced in a serious voice. "They've lost the last train. We've got to get breakfast."

"If we're going to get up as early as that," Laura declared, "I'm going to bed now. I'm so tired that I'm cross."

"I told you things always go by three's," Rosie triumphantly reminded them.

CHAPTER XXIII

SILVA'S STORY

WHEN Maida woke up the next morning, it was to the sound of a baby's crying. It was not however a sick cry; it was a sleepy cry. She glanced swiftly at the clock; then jumped out of bed. Rosie was standing in the doorway, Nesta, wearing one of Delia's nightgowns, in her arms.

"You never woke me up, Rosie Brine," Maida accused her friend.

"I tried to," Rosie replied. "Honest I did. But you couldn't seem to wake up. And when I realized what a day you had yesterday and what a day might be before you, I thought it would be better to let you sleep. Laura and I got breakfast. We've given the baby her bath and I am now taking her to bed."

Maida kissed the little curly, dusky head. "She looks fine," she said approvingly. "I'm so glad I can give Silva such good news."

"What time did you say you had to call there?"

"Ten o'clock."

"It's now half past eight," Rosie said. "And here comes Laura with your breakfast."

As Rosie disappeared with her sleeping burden, Laura appeared at the stairs carrying a tray.

"Hop back into bed, Maida Westabrook," she said serenely. "You're going to have your breakfast in bed this morning—like a princess."

Maida meekly hopped back as ordered and Laura placed the tray on the bed in front of her. On it, the peel so divided that it looked like a great golden-petaled flower, was an orange; a dish of oatmeal; an egg in an egg cup; two pieces of toast; a small pitcher of milk; sugar. Around the plate was wreathed nasturtiums, flowers and leaves.

"Oh how good it looks!" Maida said; and then after a few moments of enthusiastic eating, "Oh, how good it *tastes!* How dainty you've made this tray, Laura! I'm sure you're going to be the best housekeeper among us. You like housekeeping, don't you?"

"I just love it," Laura replied.

"I hate it." Rosie who now reappeared in the doorway, declared emphatically. "I wish you could buy blocks of dishes the way you buy

blocks of paper; so's you could tear off a clean set for every meal; then burn them up. I wish you could buy blocks of clothes just the same way."

"What a queer thing you are, Rosie!" Laura exclaimed. "I just love to have pretty things, crocheted and knit and embroidered—dainty china and glass—and keep everything neat and shining."

Maida reflectively tapped the top of her egg; meditatively removed the little bit of broken shell; absently salted and buttered it; thoughtfully tasted it. "I don't know what I like," she declared after a while, "I like to do anything—if I'm doing it with people I love. But I just despise to do anything with people I don't like."

An hour later, Maida, one foot on the pedal of her bicycle was accepting last orders in regard to marketing from Rosie and Laura; giving equally hurried advice to them.

"Don't forget to buy all the different kinds of berries you can find," Rosie said. "Berries make such an easy dessert."

"And oh, if there are any tomatoes yet, order all you can find, Maida," Laura chimed in. "I can make so many things with tomatoes;

tomato and macaroni; tomato and crackers; stewed tomatoes and boiled tomatoes."

"And don't let the fire go out," Maida replied, "and always have some one near the telephone if anybody calls up. And remember, if the baby doesn't seem all right, telephone for the doctor at once. Get the hospital on the telephone at nine o'clock and ask how Mrs. Dore is this morning." Then mounting her machine in a flash, Maida was off like a bird.

"Who would ever have thought," Rosie said looking after her, "that the Maida Westabrook who first came to Primrose Court—so pale and thin and lame—would ever grow into such a strong girl? Do you remember, Laura?"

"Of course I do. My mother didn't think she was going to live."

In the meantime, Maida was proceeding down the dewy trail, the prey to some worry but with a gradually-growing, comfortable feeling that her troubles were all over and that now things would go smoothly. She did all the marketing that had been intrusted to her and was even able, being the first on the spot, to secure a basket of early tomatoes for Laura.

As for berries—they were everywhere. Maida ordered, a little recklessly, blueberries, blackberries, currants. It was ten o'clock as she had agreed—Maida was a very prompt little girl, having been brought up to promptness by a business-like father—ten o'clock to the dot, when she walked up the Fosdick path and knocked on the door by means of a big brass knocker.

A maid servant opened the door; but just behind appeared a white-haired lady in a black silk and black silk mitts; a three-cornered bit of black lace on her soft hair.

"You are Maida Westabrook," she said smiling, "and you have come to see our little invalid. She's awake and waiting for you. If you will follow me, I will take you to her."

Mada followed Mrs. Fosdick up broad carpeted stairs and down a long sunny hallway. At the very end, the old lady pushed open a door. Silva was lying on a day couch, placed near a back window which overlooked the garden. A light gayly-flowered down puff covered her. Silva looked white but her strange amber-colored eyes seemed to hold a drop of fire.

"Good morning, Silva," Maida said.

"Good morning," Silva answered, but she

used the words awkwardly, like one who has not been accustomed to this morning greeting.

"I'm glad you are better," Maida went on and then paused in a little embarrassment. After an instant in which Silva said nothing she added, "How did it happen?"

Mrs. Fosdick interrupted. "I am going to leave you little girls alone to talk. I know you'll have things to tell each other," her kind old eyes smiled understandingly, "that you don't want grown-ups to hear."

"Oh no," Maida said involuntarily but this was only instinctive politeness on her part. She very much desired to be alone with Silva. Silva was apparently too honest to say anything. She waited until Mrs. Fosdick's footsteps were lost to hearing. Then she pulled herself upright with a sudden jerk. "How's Nesta?" she asked breathlessly.

"She's all right. She slept all night long without waking once—except when Rosie fed her at ten—and this morning she looks as sweet and dainty as a rose-bud. Don't worry about Nesta, Silva. She's all right. It's you we're worrying about."

But this did not appear to interest Silva. "How did you find her?" she demanded.

Maida told the story of her visit to the

Moraine Land, not leaving out a detail. Silva listened intently, her strange eyes unwinkingly fixed on Maida's face. "What time was this?" Silva asked.

Maida told her.

"Oh she only missed one feeding then," Silva said in a tone of acute relief. "You can just imagine," she went on, "when I came out of the faint enough to remember about the baby, how I felt. I tried to tell them here about Nesta, but nobody would listen to me. They thought I was raving and I can't blame them for that of course. I begged them, I screamed at them; then suddenly I thought of you—why I don't know. But somehow I knew I could trust you. I asked them to call you up or let me call you up. But they wouldn't. 'There! There!' they would say, 'Lie down and sleep! You'll be all right in the morning. Oh what I went through! I thought I was going crazy! And then I heard somebody using the telephone in the hall. And when they left me to go down to dinner, I crept out and called you up. Nobody heard me. They don't know yet that I telephoned. I told them last night that I knew you'd come this morning."

"It must have made you dizzy to stand up," Maida said sympathetically.

"It did. At first I thought I couldn't stand it. But I had to do it and so I did. You are sure Nesta is all right?"

"*Sure!*" Maida reiterated, smiling. "But why didn't you call up Aunt Save?"

"She was at the Warneford Fair. They all went. Tyma went too. Aunt Save's telling fortunes. Tyma and I have been making baskets for a month. He thought he could probably sell them all in three days. We talked it all over. One of us had to go and the other to stay with the baby and of course I was the one to stay with Nesta. Tyma won't be back until to-morrow."

"But I don't understand why Nesta was in the cave," Maida declared in a puzzled tone.

Silva closed her eyes for a moment and she sighed. It was a long sigh and a weary one to come from a little girl's lips.

"We've kept her there a month," she said. "We stole her—Tyma and I."

"*Stole* her!" Maida echoed in a shocked tone. "Stole her! From whom?"

"From my father," Silva answered and two big tears formed slowly in her eyes. They hung on the end of her long lashes but they did not drop. Maida handed Silva her handkerchief. Silva wiped the tears away. No more

came, and she went on with her story in a perfectly composed way.

"It's a queer story to tell and—and I'm so ashamed. You see my mother died last February when Nesta was about three months old. After mother's death, we had all the care of her—Tyma and I. It was very hard because my father—" She stopped for an instant and seemed to choke on what she was going to say. Then she went on steadily. "My father began to get drunk—more and more—But that wasn't the worst. He began to treat us badly—and I was always worried about Nesta—sometimes I was afraid he'd hurt her — Sometimes—" She stopped and looked at Maida imploringly.

Maida nodded as though she understood.

"He was worse to Tyma though, and so Tyma ran away. He joined Aunt Save and she told him to stay with them. One day he was exploring the woods and he discovered that cave. Well things got worse and worse at home— And— And— And then father told me he was going to be married again. I didn't like the—the one he was going to marry. I knew she didn't mind his drinking. She—used to drink too. She didn't like me—nor Tyma—nor Nesta. I could see that she didn't

want the care of Nesta. Tyma and I could take care of ourselves, but I knew she would be cruel to Nesta."

Silva paused; for this time it was Maida's eyes that filled. Silva held out Maida's handkerchief and Maida took it; and wiped her tears away.

"Go on," Maida said.

"Tyma came back one night very late. Father never knew he was there. He threw pebbles against my window and I came out and talked to him. He told me a plan. It was for us to run away and take Nesta with us and keep her hidden in the cave. He said he'd take the baby first. Then after a few days, I was to go to live with Aunt Save. You see if I was to run away with the baby, father would know. But if the baby was stolen while I was with him and when he thought Tyma was with Aunt Save, he could not blame it onto either of us."

"Oh Silva!" Maida gasped. "What a terrible thing to do— I mean—" She thought an instant. "What a terrible thing to *have* to do! How could you do it? I couldn't."

"You can do anything," Silva said in a voice strangely stern in one so young, "if you have to do it. So we planned it all very carefully.

Tyma went back to Aunt Save and then he returned a few nights later. While I was in the field with father, he took the baby and went back with her to Satuit; put her in the cave. He went by night and almost always through the woods. Nobody saw him. When Aunt Save woke up the next morning, Tyma was in his tent."

"What did your father say?"

"He was wild. He thought at once it was Tyma and he went over to see Aunt Save. Tyma was there, but of course there was no baby about. Aunt Save said that Tyma had no baby with him and father knew that Aunt Save wouldn't lie to him. She asked father if he didn't want me to come and live with her as long as he was going to get married. Father said yes and when he came back, he told me to go to Aunt Save. He gave me my car fare and I went."

"Didn't he do anything more to find the baby?" Maida asked in a horrified tone.

"Oh yes—he hunted everywhere—he talked about her all the time. And then after ten days or so he told the police and there were articles in the newspapers with his picture and Nesta's—it didn't look anything like her. Reporters came to see him. But after a while

nobody cared. People don't care what happens to gypsies." Silva's voice was bitter. "Then he got married and as his wife didn't want Nesta, he stopped bothering about her."

"And do you mean to tell me," Maida said in an awed voice, "that you kept the baby in the cave nearly two months?"

"Ever since just after you children came to the Little House. We were planning to steal Nesta when we saw you first. That's why we had to be so hateful to you— We had to do everything we could to keep you away from the cave. That's why we acted so terribly that first day when you were swimming in the lake and that's why we broke your canoes and that's why we stole all your lunch the day of the picnic. That day, Tyma was in the cave with the baby and I was bringing a bottle of milk and a little doll for her. She was too little to play with a doll, but I wanted her to have one. Rosie Brine caught sight of me. I dodged around the bushes and got into the cave. I think she would have thought she imagined me if I hadn't dropped the doll. Tyma and I sat there trembling . . . And then we realized that you were going to eat your lunches right near . . . The baby was asleep; but we were frightend to death for fear she

would wake up and cry . . . and then the idea came to us to steal your lunches . . . and ruin everything so you would think tramps had been there. . . . And then the baby *did* cry. . . . Oh how frightened we were! Tyma and I clung to each other and the same idea came to us both at once. I began to moan very loud. And so did Tyma. And then you couldn't trace the sound and it frightened you and you all ran away. Tyma said you would never come back and you didn't. That is, except one night, when I saw Arthur Duncan."

"I never heard or read anything like this," Maida declared solemnly. "How did you manage to take care of the baby—and bathe her and feed her?"

"It was very hard," Silva said simply. "Tyma and I took turns in spending the night in the cave. Aunt Save never knew; for we waited until everybody was asleep before we left the camp. I used to go once in the morning to heat water and bathe her and once in the afternoon to take her out in the sunlight. We made baskets all the time so that we could buy milk. Getting the milk to her though without being seen—Oh how we had to plan! I bought a little lamp and heated her milk over it. And then I was so worried! I knew

it was going to be very troublesome in a little while because it was only a question of time before Nesta would creep. Fortunately she was backward about everything—especially walking. We planned to barricade the front of the cave. But what we should do when winter came, we could not guess. And then we were so bothered about clothes—" Silva stopped and cast her eyes downward. "This is so hard to tell you!"

"Go on!" Maida urged.

"I broke into your house night before last, and stole some doll clothes. That first day you came to visit Aunt Save, I heard you talking with her about a doll you had as big as a baby, and how you kept her clothes in a little hair-cloth trunk under your window in your room. I watched the house until I found out which room was yours. There was a great tree in front of it. And that night, when everybody had gone to sleep, I climbed in your window and took all the doll clothes. You see some nights were rainy and I was afraid she wouldn't be warm enough. Please excuse me if you can. I will give them all back."

Maida was silent for an instant struggling with the situation too complicated for her young mind.

"Of course," she said at last in a tremulous voice, "stealing is always wrong. I would have given you Lucy's clothes if you had asked me for them."

"I didn't know that you would," Silva faltered. "And I didn't dare tell you about Nesta."

"Of course I saw Lucy's clothes in the cave," Maida went on. Her eyes were downcast. "Let's not speak of it again. Very likely, I would have done the same thing if I had been in your place— Only I suppose I wouldn't have stolen the baby in the beginning." She paused and then added honestly, "But perhaps that's only because I wouldn't have had the courage. What are you going to do now— I mean when you get well?"

"I don't know—" Silva answered drearily. "I'll have to wait until Tyma comes back. Everybody'll know then. Aunt Save will make me write to father that I have Nesta. He'll take Nesta away from me and that dreadful woman will have the care of her—"

And now Silva put her head in the hollow of her elbow and sobbed. But they were not the sobs of a child. They were hard and tearless. They shook Silva's whole body. Maida rushed to her side. She put her arms about

Silva; kissed her again and again. "Don't think of it any more, Silva dear," she begged. "I know it isn't as bad as you fancy. Will you let me tell my father about it? My father is a wonderful man. It is almost as though he had magic power—like a genie. He'll find some way out for you, I'm sure. Will you let me tell him?"

It was some moments before Silva's whispered "Yes" came from between her racking sobs. But very soon thereafter she sat up. "Here comes somebody," she whispered. "Please don't say anything about Nesta."

CHAPTER XXIV

GUESTS

WHEN Maida turned the bend in the path just before it came out on the Little House, she found Rosie, Laura, Arthur, Harold and Dicky drawn up in a straight soldier-like line.

"We have to report that—" they all chanted in a solemn voice.

"Mother is very comfortable and will return to us in a week," announced the radiant Dicky.

"Granny Flynn has come back," announced the beaming Laura.

"Floribel is in the kitchen," announced the smiling Harold.

"Zeke is in the garden," announced the triumphant Arthur.

"Your father is in the living room waiting for you," announced the sparkling Rosie.

"My father!" Maida exclaimed in a happy voice. "My father! Oh what a blessing that is!" She dropped her bicycle. "Oh Rosie, will you put my wheel away for me? I want to see my father so much." She didn't wait

for Rosie's hearty, "Yes, of course, goose!" but raced across the grass.

In a few minutes an unprecedented activity broke out in the Little House. Down stairs in the living room, Mr. Westabrook, who had been most of the time glued to the telephone, was still telephoning. Up-stairs in the Little House, Floribel was getting the spare room ready for one guest. Up-stairs in the barn, Zeke was putting up a cot for another. In the kitchen, Rosie was frantically making pop-overs. Between the flower garden and the spare room, Laura and Maida were swinging like a pair of active pendulums, decorating with flowers. Outside on lawn and in vegetable garden, the boys were working frantically putting everything in what Rosie called "apple pie order." Everywhere the smaller children, to whom for the moment nobody was paying any attention, were getting in everybody's way

About noon the big gray limousine appeared at the end of the trail. Zeke hurried down to it. He and Botkins lifted out the slight figure lying in the back, bore it up the path to the house and over the stairs to the guest chamber. An excited queue of children—all the young inhabitants of the Little House in fact—followed.

"All right, Silva?" Maida was enquiring and to Silva's faint "Yes," Rosie was saying, "We're all awfully glad you're going to be here with us," and "Just as soon as you are well enough, you've got to teach us how to make those beautiful baskets," Laura was contributing. The boys didn't seem to be able to do anything but they were making attempts —highly unsuccessful ones to be sure—to assist the two men.

Up-stairs, they left Silva alone with the girls. Maida immediately took off the long rusty coat that Silva was wearing, her worn and stained middy blouse; her ragged skirt; undressed her; put on first one of her own simple white nightgowns and over it her favorite dressing gown of organdie muslin with pink ribbon. Laura brought a pair of pink bed shoes; slipped them on Silva's slender feet. Rosie contributed a boudoir cap of white lace with pink ribbons which she had managed to fashion in the hour they had waited for Silva. And then in answer to the beseeching look in Silva's eyes, Rosie brought the cooing little Nesta and put her in her sister's arms.

"My father is going to send for your father, Silva," Maida explained. "He is going to ask him to let you and Tyma and the baby stay

with us. Your father will say yes, Silva—people always say yes to my father—and then if you like us, we want you to live with us as long as we stay here."

"Only a few weeks longer," Rosie added in a wailing voice, "then school begins."

Silva, only half hearing, was kissing her little sister with violent flurries of kisses. And her eyes were filling with tears. She made no effort to check them because that would have been impossible. Finally she put her head down on the arm of her chair and cried. The others kept a frightened silence. Rosie, recovering first, noiselessly removed Nesta. Silva made no attempt to keep her. Maida slipped into the bathroom and came back with a wet face cloth and a towel; proceeded to bathe Silva's face. Silva submitted meekly. Laura disappeared and returned with a bottle of toilet water with which she sprinkled Silva.

"Oh you are so good to me," Silva said when she could control her voice. "And when I think of how I treated you— I didn't want to though. I—I had to. But when I'm well, I'll gladly show you how to make baskets. And I know where the berries grow thickest and biggest . . . I'll take you to all my secret places . . . I do thank you! I do! I do! With all my heart!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE END OF SUMMER

OUTSIDE all was wind, rain, confusion and destruction. Occasionally a bough came crashing down to earth and always the branches of the great tree beside Maida's window, rubbed against the house. The wind veered and whirled. One moment the rain was coming, like a shower of bullets, against the window of one side; the next it was lashing, like a bundle of twigs, against the glass of another.

Inside was warmth, light, laughter and conversation. The older children sat about the big fireplace in the living room. Rosie was on her knees there, busily wielding a corn popper. Beside her sat Laura toasting macaroons on the end of a long fork. Silva and Maida were bringing in great pans of molasses candy which simply refused to cool. The boys were fanning it in an effort to bring it to the tasting point. The little children were running about, looking at books, or playing games, according to their tastes, perfectly confident, as

ever, that the relentless hour of eight o'clock could be put off this one evening. Mrs. Dore, quite herself again, was rocking Delia who had given way to premature fatigue. In the midst of all this excitement Granny Flynn read tranquilly from her *Lives of the Saints.*

"I can't believe the summer is over," Rosie exclaimed suddenly. "I *won't* believe it! Oh why can't things like this go on for ever?"

"I couldn't believe it either," Laura declared, "until this storm came. The weather has been so warm up to now that I wouldn't believe autumn had come. But to-day and yesterday have been fallish."

"Autumn's here," Silva said, "when the goldenrod and asters come."

"I know it," Maida agreed mournfully. "How glad I am when flowers come and how sorry I am when they go! It makes you know that summer is flying just to watch them disappear. If the flowers only stayed after they came, you wouldn't notice it so much. But they don't. They go—first the dandelions and then the violets; and then the daisies and buttercups and wild roses and iris; then the elderberry and sumach; and then the goldenrod and asters. But as soon as each one of these stops blooming, you realize that *that*

part of the summer is gone. And as soon as you see the red rose hips—" she twisted her hand through the long necklace of crimson berries that she was wearing, "—then you know that the fall has begun."

"I never thought of that before," Laura exclaimed. "Wouldn't it be perfectly beautiful if they stayed until the end of the summer, even the dandelions? Perhaps there wouldn't be room for them all though."

"This storm makes me think of fall all right," Arthur said.

"Yes, and this fire," Dicky chimed in.

"It makes me thing of *school*," Harold declared.

Everybody groaned.

"Perhaps it's the popcorn," Rosie said, "and the apples. But somehow I feel to-night just as though it were Halloween night. Oh, do you remember the beautiful party we had at Laura's last Halloween?"

"Do I?" Maida answered. "I should say I did. It was the first Halloween party I ever went to. I shall remember it as long as I live. I remember sitting in the window of the Little Shop and watching all the pumpkin lanterns come bobbing along Primrose Court. Oh how lovely it was!"

"It doesn't seem possible," Rosie reiterated dreamily, although she was vigorously shaking the popper, "that next Sunday night means Charlestown again, and Monday morning, horrid school once more. How shall we ever get used to being kept indoors? I shall stifle. I shall miss everything—oh dreadfully. But the thing I shall miss most is my lovely little room, out-of-doors. Oh no, it isn't that," she contradicted herself, "the thing I shall miss most is the cave. Everything that happens to us is like a story book; but the cave is most like a story book of all. Oh how sorry I was when we came to the end of it! I did so hope it would be a Mammoth Cave with a great big river in it and fish without eyes and chambers with stalactites and stalagmites."

"If it had been," Tyma Burle said shrewdly, "people would have been coming all the time to look at it and it wouldn't be our cave any longer. I have enjoyed tennis most of anything," Tyma went on. "I think it is the greatest game in the world."

"I don't wonder you like tennis," Laura exclaimed, "when you can beat everybody at it. Oh, how mad it still makes me to think that when I've been playing tennis for two

years that Tyma has to give himself a handicap when he plays with me."

Everybody laughed. They were always amused by the spectacle on the tennis court of Laura's rages when Tyma beat her so easily.

"I have enjoyed the deer most," Arthur declared.

This specification of enjoyment had developed to a game now. Arthur went on. "Having those deer about is the most like Robin Hood of anything I've ever known. It's like stories you read in Kipling and Stevenson. When I come across a group of them in the woods, I feel—well I give it up—I don't know how I feel."

"I know what Dicky enjoys most," Maida said.

"What?" Dicky demanded.

"The white peacocks."

Dicky admitted it. "But the swimming and the canoeing and the tennis, too," he added as though a little jealous for these new sports of his. "But of course the white peacocks most—Well, if Arthur thinks the deer are like adventure stories I think the peacocks are like all the fairy stories in the world come true. What do you enjoy most, Maida?"

Maida thought carefully. "Everything! Having all of you here."

"Oh but what special thing, Maida?" Rosie pleaded. "There's always one thing you like better than others."

"Betsy's badness, then," Maida admitted. "I've never laughed so much in all my life as at the things Betsy does. You see when I was a little girl, I was so sick that I never did anything really naughty but Betsy— Oh she's such fun!"

"I've enjoyed the keeping house part most," Laura stated with enthusiasm. "I never had the chance before to cook all the things I wanted in a real kitchen—and dust rooms—and arrange things—and put the flowers about. I just love setting the table for Sunday night supper."

"I hate it," burst out Rosie. "I hate every single thing you like, Laura. But I'm glad you like it because then I don't have to do it." Rosie poured the popper-full of white corn into a big brown bowl. "Now don't all grab at once!" She commanded, as a half-a-dozen eager hands reached towards the table. "Wait until I pour melted butter on it. That makes it perfectly *scrumptious!* There you are!

Now each one of you take a plate, and spoon the corn out on it."

The bowl passed rapidly from hand to hand. Rosie embedded her sharp little teeth into the shining coral of a Baldwin apple. "Oh what a good apple!" she said.

"What did you enjoy most, Silva?" Maida asked curiously, her mouth full of popcorn.

"Oh, living in a house!" Silva answered instantly. "You don't know what fun that is to me. All my life I have lived either in a tent or a wagon. All my life I have longed to live in a house with lace curtains in the windows. How I love that little room of mine I can't tell you! And yet at first— Do you know— I was afraid I couldn't stand it? It seemed as though the walls were pressing in on me and I couldn't get enough air. Many and many a night, I got up and went downstairs in the middle of the night and slept in the hammock. Sometimes I felt like a bird in a cage—as if I was beating my wings the way I've seen birds do."

"I've never got quite used to it," Tyma confessed. "Sometimes, even now I have to get up in the middle of the night and go out and sleep on the grass."

"My!" Rosie exclaimed. "I should think

that would be a hard bed. What have you enjoyed most, Harold?"

"Oh going all over the country on my bicycle," Harold explained. "You see always before we have gone to Marblehead Neck and you always have to go so far before you come to any new country. But here you start out in any direction and you are somewhere else before you know it."

The little children who, as the popcorn approached the eating point, had been lured out of the room, now came in to say good night. As usual they were rebellious about going to bed; but were comforted by the promise of a long train-ride next Sunday. As Arthur tactfully concealed the popcorn under his chair and Tyma mimicking him, shoved the apples under the couch, the good nights were effected without tragedy.

"How well they all look!" Maida said proudly. "They are as freckled and sunburned as they can be and fat as little butterballs!"

CHAPTER XXVI

PROMISE

"WHAT are you going to do in the winter, Maida?" Rosie asked.

"I don't know," Maida answered. "Father hasn't made up his mind yet and it all depends of course upon what he is going to do."

"Then if he went to Europe, you'd go too?"

"Yes," Maida admitted. "But I don't think we'll go to Europe. At least," she added conscientiously, "he hasn't said we would. I don't know what we'll do."

"But if you don't go to Europe, will you go to school?" Silva asked.

"I don't know," Maida responded. "Perhaps I'll have a governess."

"What would you rather do, Maida?" persisted Rosie.

"I think I'd rather go to school," Maida answered honestly.

"And what kind of a school?" Rosie kept it up.

"Oh the school you all go to—in Charlestown. I'd love that."

"Oh how I wish your father would let you," Rosie declared fervently. "Wouldn't it be fun? But then you know all they could teach you there. You know geography and history and literature."

"Oh but my arithmetic is dreadful," Maida declared, "and my spelling, and father says he is perfectly ashamed of my writing."

"But you speak French," Laura said enviously, "and Italian!"

"A very little Italian," Maida confessed.

"But you can read fairy tales in French," Dicky said. "Oh what a lucky girl!"

"Yes, I *do* think I'm lucky in that," Maida agreed with him.

"And if you aren't very good in arithmetic, you know all about English and French and Italian money," Harold asserted. "I think that's great!"

"It's very easy to learn that," Maida said deprecatingly. "How I wish I knew fractions and percentage and square root—like you, Rosie."

"Rosie was the smartest girl in the room in arithmetic," Dicky declared. "She could beat any one of us, and as for mental arithmetic—whew! And she always won in the spelling matches."

"I never was in a spelling match in my life," Maida said in a grieved tone. "How I should enjoy it—except of course that I'd fail in the first word they gave me."

"Yes," Dicky informed her, "they always give you something like *receive* and *believe* or *Mississippi* or *separate!* I shall never learn how to spell *separate* as long as I live."

"I'll tell you how to remember it," Harold offered. "You know there's a city in South America called Para. Well, I always remember that there's a Para right in the middle of separate."

"Gee that makes it easy!" Dicky's voice was grateful. "I won't forget that." After an instant he added, "I hate school!"

"So do I," said Rosie.

"So do I," said Laura.

"So do I," said Arthur.

"So do I," said Harold.

"I never went to school," Maida said sadly.

"Nor I," admitted Silva.

"Nor I," admitted Tyma.

"You'd want to go to school if you'd never had the chance," Maida announced to the quartette of discontented ones. "Isn't that true?" She appealed to Silva and Tyma.

They both nodded.

"Everybody wants what he doesn't have," Rosie said eagerly. "Now I should like to travel like Maida."

"Who wouldn't!" exclaimed Laura and Arthur together.

"And I'd like to have a tutor," Dicky declared. "Somebody to read to you and answer all your questions. I should think that would be great."

"I don't believe you would like school long, Maida," Rosie went on. "At least if you went to the same kind of school we go to. Isn't that so, Arthur?"

Arthur nodded. "They're no fun."

"When the teacher puts the arithmetic problems on the blackboard," Rosie said, "I always get them done in five minutes. I'm good in arithmetic and they're almost always correct. Then there's nothing for me to do until the rest of the children have finished but read in my Reader that I've read through a million times; or my Geography that I have read just as often; or in the Supplementary Reading that I know just as well."

"That's stupid," Maida decided reflectively.

"And then, when we have to write compositions, I nearly die," Rosie went on in the same discontented vein. "I hate composi-

tions. I never can think of anything to say. I always have to stay after school—"

"Why Rosie, you write the most *wonderful* letters," Maida protested. "Oh how I enjoyed getting them abroad! You told me all the things I wanted to know and how I used to laugh at them too."

"Oh well, letters aren't writing!" Rosie said scornfully. "Anybody can write letters."

"I can't," Arthur declared, "I hate writing letters."

"I don't think it's easy to write letters," Laura interrupted, "although Maida and Rosie do it so easily. I think they're just as hard as a composition. If you can write a letter, you ought to be able to write a composition, and if you can write a composition, you ought to be able to write a letter."

"And then," Arthur went on with the argument, "geography is so dull in school. You never learn about the places you'd like to know about—like Gibraltar and the Desert of Sahara and the North Pole and the jungles of Africa and the Great Wall of China, and the Mammoth Cave and the Grand Cañon. Or history. Now I'd like to study about Richard Cœur de Lion and Robert Bruce and William Tell and Thermopylæ and the Alamo and the

Battle of Hastings and Waterloo and Gettysburg. But you never get anything about them."

"Gracious!" Rosie commented, "I don't even know what those are."

"Sometimes I like school," Dicky said hesitatingly.

"That's because you have only gone to school one year," Laura declared scornfully.

"Well I'd rather be with you in a school that wasn't very interesting," Maida persisted, "than not be with you at all. Now next summer in the Little House—"

"Next summer!" Rosie interrupted. *"Oh Maida, is there going to be a next summer?"*

"Is there going to be a next summer?" Maida repeated. She stared about the circle of faces; all very intent; all waiting almost with hushed breath, for her reply. "Of course there's going to be a next summer. What made you think there wasn't?"

"You never said once there was going to be a next summer," Dicky accused her out of the hubbub which succeeded this statement. "Oh I could jump up and down!"

"I *shall* jump up and down," Rosie announced—and did until the glass pendants to the candelabra tinkled.

Maida could only repeat feebly, "But of course there's going to be a next summer. It never occurred to me to tell you so. I thought you understood."

"Not only a next summer, but next summers," a voice said back of them.

They all started and then jumped to their feet. Mr. Westabrook, coming in very quietly, had apparently caught much of their discussion.

"A whole line of summers, all in a row," he added as he took the easy chair which Arthur pushed into the middle of the circle for him. He helped himself to popcorn from the plate which Rosie filled and placed in his lap; took one of the apples which Laura offered him; a piece of the molasses candy which Tyma pressed upon him. "You've got a permanent engagement with us every summer."

Again Rosie did what Dicky had threatened to do—she jumped up and down. Laura danced the whole length of the room, turning out one after another a series of the most beautiful pirouettes. Silva did not move except to lean forward and stare intently at Mr. Westabrook. The boys drew their chairs in a circle closer about him.

"So you don't think schools are very inter-

esting?" Buffalo Westabrook went on, bending his eagle glance on Arthur.

"Not any I have ever been to," Arthur answered promptly.

"Do you think they could be made interesting?" Mr. Westabrook went on.

"I'm not sure they could," Arthur answered.

But Rosie broke in with an impulsive, "Of course they could."

"How?" Mr. Westabrook asked with his disturbing brevity.

"By letting you study the things you want, in the way you want to study them," Rosie answered immediately.

"I guess that's as good an answer as I could get," Mr. Westabrook admitted. "What would you say," he went on very slowly after a pause, "if we tried to have such a school as that *here?*" He continued apparently unconscious of the excitement which was developing in his hearers. "A school where, as Rosie says, you could study the things you want to study, in the way you want to study them. A school with plenty of books to read and dictionaries and encyclopedias and books of reference to consult. A book with all the newest maps and globes. A school with plenty of travel and discovery and exploration. A

school with gardens to grow. A school with a magic lantern, an aquarium, and—"

Maida could contain herself no longer. "Father," she burst out, "you're going to have such a school for us!"

"I've got it," Buffalo announced. "And you're all going to that school this winter."

"Oh my goodness," Rosie said in a quiet awed voice, "if anything else happens I shall die of happiness."

"Do our fathers and mothers know?" Laura asked.

"Know," Mr. Westabrook repeated, though very tranquilly, "they helped to decide what you should study there."

"And we won't be separated after all," Dicky declared in a voice shaken with happiness.

"No."

"What's the name of the school?" Harold asked.

"It hasn't any name yet," Mr. Westabrook answered.

"I know what to call it," Arthur said, his face lighting up. "We've had *Maida's Little Shop* and *Maida's Little House.* Why not call it *Maida's Little School?*"

THE END

Maida's Little Shop
Primrose Court
Massachusetts
House Rock
Fairy Ring
Tree House
Road to Maida's Little Camp in the Adirondacks
The Little House
The Big House
Tilestone Hollow
Boy's House
Mess Hall
Girl's House
Tilestone Lane
Post Office
Brick House
The Barn
Old Mill

Northern Eye
Spectacles Island
The Bridge
Stonehenge
Southern Eye
The Ark
Sandy Beach
Atlantic Ocean
N
W
E
S
THE BIG 8